Interview with Talcott W. Seelye

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR TALCOTT W. SEELYE

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is September 15, 1993. This is an interview with Ambassador Talcott W. Seelye which is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies. I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. To start off, I would like to get something about your background, a bit about your family, where you grew up and went to school, etc.

SEELYE: I was born in 1922 in Beirut, Lebanon where my father was a professor. I was born as a fourth generation of my family to live in the Middle East. It was my mother's family which first started the process.

Q: What was your mother's family name?

SEELYE: It was Chambers, but the first member of my family who went to the Middle East had the name of Frederick Williams. He went out there around 1840 as a Congregational missionary to Mosul in Turkey. You can imagine what the conditions were like in Mosul, Turkey in the middle of the nineteenth century. In his efforts to get established he lost his first three wives successively to disease, pestilence and the usual hygienic conditions that existed there. The first wife was the mother of my mother's mother, that is the daughter of Frederick Williams. She married a Canadian Congregational minister and induced him to go out to the Middle East. That was my grandmother, and she had come back here to go

to college, etc. So he goes out as a missionary, as a second generation of the Williams clan, although his name is Chambers, to be a missionary in the Ottoman Empire. He happened to be in what became Turkey proper.

My mother was born in Turkey and sent to the States to go to college where she met my father.

Q: Where did they go to college?

SEELYE: He went to Amherst and she went to Bryn Mawr. She did her Ph.D. dissertation on Islam at Columbia. After he finished Amherst he went to the Divinity School at Columbia to become a minister. For three years he was a minister in New Jersey. Then the beck and call of the Middle East that was there in my mother's mind-set got him to go out to the Middle East to follow suit.

Q: Seems like it was dangerous for a male to marry one of your family.

SEELYE: That's right. So he goes out there in 1919 as a professor, not as a missionary, to the University of Beirut.

So those were the three generations that started in the Middle East, and I was born there as a fourth. Then, of course, I served in the Middle East while in the Foreign Service. One of my four children who carried on the tradition, the youngest daughter, Kate, who studied Arabic at Amherst, spent two years abroad at the American University in Cairo, and then went out to live in Jordan for three years where she taught English at a secondary school and worked with Queen Noor. So she became a fifth generation to go out there. The family has had these connections for all that time.

Q: Do you have any recollections of the Middle East as a young lad?

SEELYE: Sure I do. I left at the age of eleven and remember, of course, growing up in Beirut. One of the unfortunate aspects of my youth in Beirut was that I became 1000

percent American and resisted learning Arabic. We had an American community school where in those days and Arabic was not taught. At home, we happened to have Armenian servants because there were so many Armenian orphans and refugees who fled Turkey after the massacres. My grandparents lived with us, above us, and they and we hired Armenian orphans as servants; so I did not have an opportunity to learn Arabic from the servants. The result was that my parents decided at one point, when I was nine or ten, to bring in an Arabic tutor to teach me and one of my sisters.

I apparently resisted that and the result was that when I left Beirut at the age of eleven, I am ashamed to say, I knew only a half a dozen Arabic expressions. This came home to roost at one point later on when I was in the U.S. Army. After basic training at Camp Walters, Texas, my record card popped up, “Oh, Seelye has spent 10 years in the Middle East.” So they pulled me out and sent me to the intelligence training center at Camp Ritchie, Maryland where I was interviewed by an Arab-American to see how fluent my Arabic was. He noted that my Arabic was virtually non-existent.

Anyway, that was the beginning of my awareness that having lived that long in Beirut, people would assume that I knew Arabic. Later on in the Foreign Service, when I spent all the hours of drudgery and blood, sweat and tears learning Arabic and reaching a modest degree of efficiency, people would say, “Oh, yeah, Talcott knew Arabic as a boy.” That used to bother me because this did not take into account all the effort I had put into learning Arabic as an adult.

Q: When you came back, where did you go to school?

SEELYE: We came back in 1933 when my father was on a sabbatical. During this time he taught at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, so I went to the Smith College Day School. That was during the depression. The President of the American University of Beirut, Boyard, asked my father to extend for a year because the university was having financial problems. So the second year my father taught at Bennington College,

commuting from Northampton. While he was there he was offered the presidency of St. Lawrence University and we moved to Canton, New York—never going back to Beirut.

I went to high school in Canton, New York and then to Prep School for two years at Deerfield Academy and on to Amherst. I went to Amherst automatically because of my family connections with Amherst going back generations.

Q: Were you pointing towards anything when you were in Amherst?

SEELYE: Absolutely not. I was a history major. When I left Amherst to go into the Service in March, 1943, I had no particular career in mind. I was beginning my senior year at that point and still didn't know what I wanted to do after graduation. After three and a half years in the Service I came back to Amherst to finish out.

Q: Could you give me an idea where you served?

SEELYE: Yes. After Camp Ritchie, believe it or not, I was sent to Iran. The Middle East must have had a subconscious magnetic attraction. At that point we had a large contingent of American troops in Iran in what was called the Persian Gulf Command. This was one of our principal military supply lines to the Soviet Union. Additionally, there was the Murmansk route by sea. The Murmansk route was very insecure because half of our ships were being sunk. So, we needed a more secure route and in late 1942 started to bring stuff up through the Persian Gulf. The Persian Gulf Command was running trains and trucks from Khorramshahr up to the Soviet sector of Iran. The Soviets had occupied the northern part of Iran just beyond Tehran and as far as the Caspian Sea and the Soviets took over the shipments in their zone.

The reason I went out there was because the morale of the troops of this command was at rock bottom. They didn't feel they were in the war since they weren't being shot at. Most of these guys came from trucking or railroad families and had had limited military training. So I was part of an Information and Education program designed to tell the troops why they

were there and to keep them informed of what was going on in the war. This entailed much lecturing.

Then VE Day came but we stayed on. Then V-J Day came and we still stayed on to protect the various military installations we had there. Since there was no need for an international education program anymore, I was sent down to what had once been a large military installation. It was just a ghost camp of about 50 GIs in a place called Khorramabad, which was halfway between Tehran and the Gulf. You may recall that at that point the Soviets established an Azerbaijani Republic. Azerbaijan straddles the Iranian-Soviet border. There has always been a degree of Azerbaijani nationalism, which the Soviets took advantage of. Iran, of course, wasn't happy about this nor were we. Finally, President Truman added a sweetener to the Soviets: “We will pull our troops out of Iran if you do the same.” The Soviets agreed and suddenly in October (1946), I guess it was, we got orders to prepare to pull out within a week. Tehran headquarters would dispose of the installations and we in the field would dispose of the moveable equipment.

In Khorramabad a tribal leader whom I knew came to me and said, “Now, I know these are going to be closed bids, but why don't you and I cut a deal. You just tell me what the lowest closed bid is and I will undercut that price and give you a cut.” I in high dudgeon said, “This isn't the way we do business.” I mention this because he turned out to have the lowest bid. He was especially interested in the ping pong tables, the mattress covers and odds and ends like that!

Anyway we pulled out of Iran but I didn't have enough points to be demobbed out of the Service, since I hadn't served in a combat area. So the ship that took us out dropped some of us off at Italy where about one hundred of us were assigned. I was assigned to a position in the Allied Force Headquarters in Caserta. Six months later the process of demobilization was accelerated and I came back to the States in July, 1946 and then reentered Amherst.

I really didn't have to stay for two semesters since I had enough credits, but I decided to stay for two semesters anyway. On my way back to Amherst I happened to stop off at Deerfield. There the famous headmaster Frank Boyder—who was there for 60 years—asked me, “What are you going to do after Amherst?” I replied, “I haven't the vaguest idea.” He said, “Why don't you come up here and teach and coach?” I said, “Well, sure.”

While I was finishing out at Amherst I had begun to think about going into the field of international affairs. Having served abroad and having lived abroad I came to realize that that was the field I wanted. But I felt that I had committed myself to at least one year at Deerfield. In any case this year would afford me time to look into various possibilities. So while I was teaching at Deerfield I came down to Washington a couple of times to look into various options. CIA was just getting going and it had a lot of sex appeal. I had been in Army intelligence at one point and had taught combat intelligence at Camp Ritchie.

Q: And also the CIA was very much aimed at Amherst, Williams, Harvard, Yale, Princeton. It was very much a creature of the OSS, which came from these ranks.

SEELYE: That's true. In those days there was no talk about covert operations, it was merely intelligence. So it had some appeal. But while I had served in Iran I happened to have met at the American Embassy a long-legged, good-looking secretary who later became the wife of one of my bosses. One time she said to me, “Why don't you go into the Foreign Service when you graduate from college?” I said, “What's the Foreign Service?” She said, “Well, they give this exam every year and this and that.” So that was the first sewing of the seed of possibly going into the Foreign Service.

On one of my trips to Washington I also saw some people at the State Department. I remember somebody got me into a meeting with a deputy under secretary, or somebody who was fairly high ranking, who argued in favor of the Foreign Service. And then, one day I happened to see on a bulletin board a notice of a four-day examination for entry into the Service. I thought that this must be a pretty selective outfit. That whetted my appetite

a little bit more. To make a long story short I left Deerfield after one year and having been away from college for an extended period I decided I needed some brushing up. In those days there was a summer school at George Washington which served a cram course for the 4-day exam. Unlike the exam today it was all substantive.

Q: You wrote a lot, I remember.

SEELYE: Yes. You had a half day in economics, a half day in history. You had to be up to date on substance. So I took that summer course with a number of others who came into the Foreign Service and many who didn't make it.

Then, of course, in those days you had to wait a long time before coming in.

Q: You came into the Foreign Service when?

SEELYE: Well, I passed the written exam in 1948 and the orals in March, 1949. Then there were delays of a couple of years before they brought us in because they were at that point trying to build up an administrative cadre. The Foreign Service was expanding, as you recall, and they were opening posts all over the world. So evidently they felt the need for a lot of administrative specialists. I didn't know this at the time, I learned it later. They gave these slots to FSSs, not FSOs. We paid the price since we had to wait. I finally came in, in March, 1951—there is a long story as to why I came in this late. I should have come in a year before that but there was a security problem.

Q: Could you tell us about the security problem just to give us a feeling of the times?

SEELYE: Okay. It so happened that in 1949 a Kreis Resident Officer program was set up for Germany. I was interviewed and selected. There were 27 of us who went over there in March, 1950, all waiting for our FSO appointments. We were appointed as FSS-7s which meant a salary of about $2,000 more than what we would get as FSO-6s. This made us happy at the time. We had a fascinating two years as Kreis Resident Officers. It was an

incredible experience. We were the eyes and ears of the High Commission in these Kreis countries.

Q: I would like to document the Foreign Service's role in the Kreis Program.

SEELYE: Should I continue with the security problem first?

Q: Yes, and return to the Kreis program afterwards.

SEELYE: I had been there about six months when I got a written interrogatory from the security people saying: (1) We understand your brother-in-law, Peter Franck—my elder sister married an American who had been a German and had come to the United States to become an American citizen—who we understand was a member of the communist party when he was a student at the University of Berlin. (2) We understand that your sister is a member of the Washington Book Shop—which is on the Attorney General's list as a subversive organization. (3) What is your relationship with your brother-in-law? (4) What are your political views?

I was astounded. I wrote a strong response saying: “I know my brother-in-law well and he is a solid American citizen and a democrat. I know that he had attended the University of Berlin and while there was active as an anti-Nazi. He was arrested by the Gestapo and beaten up. He finally fled Germany by skiing over the mountains into Switzerland. He is an anti-communist.”

Well, it so happened that I should have gotten my FSO appointment around March of 1950 but the security issue delayed it. It didn't bother me much at the time because I was earning $2,000 more a year. My FSO appointment finally came through in March, 1951, a year late.

I finished my two years in Germany, we will come back to that later, go back to the States in 1952, and I am then assigned to Amman, Jordan. While I am in Amman promotion

lists come out and my name is not there. Since my ratings were quite good I began to think: “Uh oh, this security problem has come up to plague me again.” So, when my two years in Amman were up (in October, 1954) and when I went back to Washington I started buttonholing people. I first met with the inspector who had visited Jordan. I said that I wanted to get to the bottom of this. If the security issue was going to continue to plague me, I wanted to get out of the Service. The first interrogatory that I received happened before the McCarthy era, during the Democratic Administration. Now we are getting into the McCarthy era, so things were even worse.

Then I went to see Ray Hare, the Director General of the Foreign Service, and raised the issue with him. Then I decided to do something else as well. I had met the security officer in Bonn when I was in Germany and he had seemed sympathetic. By this time he had become Director of Security in the State Department. So I went up to his secretary and said, “I would like to see Mr. Minor.” She said to me, “Are you...?” And I said, “Yes.” What she presumably meant was, “Are you an agent?” I was determined to see him. He agreed to see me and looked puzzled when I came in. I mentioned to him that we had met in Bonn and then he said that he remembered. I described to him my situation and stressed that I wanted to get to the bottom of my case. He said, “Your case is probably at the bottom of a pile somewhere. You are a junior officer and there are many, many cases being studied. It just takes a long time to get to the bottom of the pile.” I asked him if he would do me the favor of examining my case while I was in Washington for two months of home leave. I said that if it wasn't worked out I would quit the Foreign Service.

After one month I got a summons to come down to Washington for an oral interrogatory. So I came down and sat around a table with several persons. There was a guy with a stenotype machine recording the proceedings and three or four other people. They spent about an hour and a half delving into every possible nook and cranny of my family. It was an incredible experience. They started out with my brother-in-law, of course. I pointed out that he was a fervent anti-Nazi. I understood that in his student organization in Berlin there were a lot of communists because most of the militant anti-Nazis were evidently

communists. But he was not one of them. His father was totally apolitical. He was a well-known chemistry professor. I pointed out that my brother-in-law had worked with the OPA during the war and no questions had been raised.

Then they went into my sister's connections with the Washington Book Shop. Then I had another sister who had started the Theater Lobby here in Washington. At one point it had had the word “workshop” in its title. “Workshop” had a negative connotation. Then they had found somebody with the same name as my uncle-in-law, Donald Blanschell. This man was secretary of the communist party in Atlanta. Additionally, they had my father on the griddle at St. Lawrence University where as president he had supposedly harbored a communist. I said, “I know who you mean.” There was a Canadian professor there who was very bright and intellectually compatible with my father but who had organized a union against my father because my father sought to clean out the academic deadwood. And he had. So a teachers' union was formed in protest, with this professor as its spark plug. Thus, he caused problems for my father, who left St. Lawrence after five years partly as a result of the union's efforts. So I said, “Rather than my father's having supported him, he is partially responsible for my father's departure.”

Finally I asked, “What do you have against me?” The reply, “We have nothing against you.” After the interrogatory was over and as I was standing aside with one of those present I commented: “Look, I would like to know whether this is going to work out or not because I will have to make a decision about the Foreign Service.” He said, “I think you can go on to Beirut to the language school (where I had been assigned).” Sure enough, six months later a delayed promotion came through—and from FSO-6 to FSO-5. By that time I had been in the Service five years! I hoped that my security problem was behind me.

To jump ahead and complete the story on security, from then on promotions came through nicely. I requested my security file about five years ago from the Department of State.

Q: This is after you retired?

SEELYE: Yes. I got my file and a third of it was crossed out. I discovered that at one point in my career the security issue had threatened to rear its ugly head again. In 1961 when I was back in Washington on the Arabian Peninsula desk the Department had just developed satellite intelligence. It was a new thing. It was so new that it was super sensitive. Nobody outside a selected few was supposed to know that we had it. Therefore it was on a need-to-know basis for people who held sensitive positions. It was decided that because of the job I had I should have access to this intelligence. I had noticed that every now and then when I would talk to my boss about things I would say, “I don't really think this is happening.” And he would say, “Well, I know it is.” And I would say, “How?” He would say, “Well, I can't tell you.”

I discovered from my file that when they were re-clearing me for this sensitive access the head of INR requested that I be checked out again in light of my security file. The case was again put before the loyalty board—in those days you had two things, one was the loyalty question and the other was the security question. The board replied, “We have gone through this chapter and verse in the past and this guy is okay. There is no need to review the case.” On that basis I was cleared. So obviously the security issue had popped up again and, who knows, it might have again later! But this didn't show up in the file.

Q: Well, it certainly gives a feel for the time.

SEELYE: Well, some day I will have to write a piece for the New Yorker. The case is unbelievable.

Oh, to add another vignette. When I left Germany after two years I had to be re-cleared. I guess everyone was re-cleared after each post. The security person given the task of checking me out was an Army tech sergeant in counterintelligence, who was assigned to the Kreis in which I had served. He had the job of ascertaining whether I was a loyal and “secure” American. He did so by going to the German officials that I had been dealing with, the Burgermeister and the Landrat and to German friends, to find out if I was a loyal

American! And I had been there two years trying to get Germany back into the democratic stream. Here is an American asking Germans if I was a loyal American. An extraordinary thing! The first time I got hints of what was going on was when a German friend wrote me and said, “Somebody has been asking about you and we can't figure out what is going on. He wants to know if you are a good American.”

Q: I know that the Washington Book Shop was a favorite place because people could get 35 percent off. They would get on the list and then “whammo.”

Going back now, could you explain the Kreis Resident Program? It was a very unique experience for a whole series of Foreign Service Officers of your age group coming into the Foreign Service. Could you explain a little bit about where you were and what you were doing?

SEELYE: Sure. First let me say we were all older than the usual entering Foreign Service Officer because we were all World War II veterans. Our average was 29 or 30 when we came in. I was 28. And I might add that I think we had a higher quotient of idealism than many others because of our World War experiences.

Q: It was a selective process. You might touch on this. I think people coming into the Foreign Service certainly had a feeling of mission in those days.

SEELYE: Oh, yes. We were very idealistic. It never occurred to us that we were not going to make much money. That was not an issue. I was only vaguely aware of what an “ambassador” was. We weren't in it because we wanted to make ambassador. We wanted to serve abroad and serve our country.

Anyway, it is interesting how we were selected to be Kreis Resident Officers. As you know, the U.S. Army trained military officers to be military government officers in anticipation of Germany's defeat and occupation. When Germany gave up these people were assigned the task of running Germany, but they left in 1948. The High Commission didn't come

in until 1949 and between 1948-49, it was still the U.S. military running Germany. The people who took the places of the trained military government officers were ex-military officers who decided to hang around. A high percentage of them were carpetbaggers, unfortunately. They stayed behind to make money and they did. There were a lot of opportunities to make a fast buck in the post-war situation. You could sell cigarettes for a great profit, gasoline, etc. So those officers—not all of them—were not establishing a very good reputation among the Germans.

So somebody had the idea...I think Glenn Wolf was one of those...in the State Department or out in HICOG that here were these young Foreign Service Officers waiting around for their FSO appointments who had taken their exams in 1947, and 1948. And here were these guys in Germany who were creating a bad name for the U.S. Why don't we take these young Foreign Service Officers and send them out there to take their places? By that time the High Commission had taken over so the State Department could assign people to take the place of these carpetbaggers.

We were in the first group to go. We were first assigned to the Foreign Service Institute to learn German because most of us didn't know German. We had a crash course and were there for almost three months. Then we went out to Bad Homburg where we were briefed by various people at the HICOG headquarters about our jobs, after which we scattered to the various Kreis, Kreis is a county. We were given the choice of going to Baden-Wurttemberg, Hesse or Bavaria. While I was waiting for my appointment I had worked in INR where a former German worked. I asked him for his advice. He suggested that I request Baden-Wurttemberg because it had once had a democratic tradition. So I requested Baden-Wurttemberg and was assigned there with four others. Most of the others went to Bavaria.

By this time the Germans had resumed control of the government/administrative machinery. The U.S. no longer operated by fiat. But since we were the replacements for the military operators it was difficult for the Germans to adjust quickly to the change.

Bear in mind also that by 1950 the Soviet Union was perceived as the primary threat. So our earlier policy of keeping the Germans down and making them pay a price shifted to bringing Germany on to the anti-communist bandwagon. So I got there at just the time that we were focusing on building friendships and creating links with the Germans, which was a nice time to be there, of course. But the Germans didn't always adjust quickly to that. So as soon as I arrived—my first place was Mosbach—I was addressed as “Herr Commandant.” I said, “I'm not a commandant.” So they would say, “Herr Gouverneur.” And I would say, “Hey, look, I am not a gouverneur, I am just Mr. Seelye.” So after that they called me “Herr Mr. Seelye.”

Well, our mission was varied. In 1952 I wrote a series of two articles for the Foreign Service Journal on what we did. We were there primarily to develop relationships and to get the Germans to understand what U.S. policy was. Also we were to help them democratize, although we weren't naive enough to think that outsiders could come in and democratize them. At least we might do things that would move them in that direction. In a sense we were kind of public affairs officers.

We had certain specific jobs as well. For example, I remember I had to sign permits for any German who wanted to go to East Germany. We also were somewhat involved in legal affairs, not for the Germans, but for the displaced persons and the refugees. We served as liaison with the U.S. military. In Mosbach we didn't have any U.S. military, but I was in Ulm for a while and there we had a U.S. military installation. My job was to smooth relations between the Germans and the military.

One of the things that I did was try to establish citizen committees out in the gemeindes or villages. Each German town had a gemeinderat or town council that worked with the mayor. The feeling was that these were the same people who had been running Germany before the Nazis came along and were stuck in their ways. There was a perceived need for a constructive countervailing group. So we tried to establish these citizens committees comprised of people who were not in the gemeinderat, not in the establishment, who

would serve as a constructive opposition—forcing the others to open up a little bit. At one time, I remember, one of the Germans most eager to join a citizens committee in one town (after he had had a few beers that I had paid for) proved to be a former member of the SS! No wonder he was outside the establishment.

I would visit the Burgermeister and Landrat on a regular basis to talk about things. What I would do, since my German was limited when I went out to establish a citizens committee, was to start out in my German and then get my very able German to translate for me. He had been captured in Tunisia by the Americans and had spent three or four years in a POW camp where he had learned English. He was then studying for a graduate degree at the University of Heidelberg. He was a great help. In fact he was so good that he led an English language group that met at our house once a week. He would pick suitable American topics to discuss. For example, I recall that once we discussed Hemingway and another time we discussed Aaron Copeland. The group included some high school students and several scientists because a scientific institute had been transferred to Mosbach from Berlin.

Occasionally I would go to the local high school and take over the history class and just talk about aspects of the United States. I discovered that still in those days, in the early fifties, the German educational system was still very structured, very rigid. I could never get a discussion going. Nobody would even ask me a question. The high school students who came to our English language group used to tell us that the reason for that was because the teacher always had the final word. Obviously things have changed, but that was the system then.

My whole staff was German. I had a Woman's Affairs Officer who tried to get the women active in community affairs. Another member of my staff would attend meetings, take notes and prepare reports. Maybe this sounds like spying, but it kept me up to date. In those days there were several German ethnic groups who had fled to Germany from neighboring territories. There was for example, a Silesian group and a Sudeten Deutsche group.

Sometimes I was asked to address them. My reporter was an ex-army officer whose English was good. This was a good experience for me and it was a great way to come into the Foreign Service! We had the best house in town.

Q: Were you married at the time?

SEELYE: Yes. I had gotten married shortly before going to Germany. We lived in a requisitioned house filled with the best furniture that had been collected by the army from the German community. When we invited German friends to our house I would see them sometimes checking out their furniture. Just before we left we discovered in our bomb shelter an expensive painting (all boarded up) obviously stolen by the previous home owner from some place. We turned it over to the local occupations cost office.

I had been apprehensive originally about going to Germany having been in World War II and having studied modern European history. But the opportunity for a new and challenging experience overrode my reluctance. Once I got there we made some good friends. As self-disciplined people, the Germans I associated with never showed any hostility—though the war was fresh in their minds. They were always friendly and correct.

Q: This is pretty much the attitude. I think the Americans and the Germans got along really pretty well in most instances.

SEELYE: They did. And even American troops got along much better with the Germans than they did with the French.

Q: And even the British, I think. I was a soldier in Darmstadt, in the Air Force, in 1953 or so. Did you ever get any taste of the real world of the Foreign Service? Go to consulates or anything like that?

SEELYE: Yes. We would go to Stuttgart every month for a meeting of Kreis Resident Officers and there would be a consular representative there. I remember being invited

once to a consular reception and acknowledging to the senior consular officer that I really hadn't had a conventional Foreign Service experience, which I noticed he put on my rating as a negative factor. Guess I shouldn't have said that. While serving as a Kreis Resident Officer did not contribute to advancement in the Service, it certainly was an experience worth having had.

Q: You left there in 1952 and then...

SEELYE: While I was in Germany I requested Arabic language training. At one point during my tour in Germany I thought that I might like to specialize in German affairs. Then I realized that there were plenty of others with more of a German background. That was when I decided to look to the Middle East given my background and the fact that that region was opening up. The response to my request for Arabic language training was that nobody could have such training until they had served a tour in the Middle East. So I was assigned to a post in the Middle East, namely, Amman, Jordan. I was picked for the post by the then newly-appointed Ambassador to Amman Joseph C. Green. He was the man who devised the Foreign Service exams in those days. He had been a professor at Princeton at one point. It so happened that he was head of the orals panel when I came into the Foreign Service.

I will digress a bit to tell you the story there. When I appeared before the panel I noticed that the chairman was a formidable-looking person with a great white mustache. Green's first question was, I was a bachelor at the time, “Mr. Seelye, do you drink?” I said, “Yes, I have an occasional beer.” Next question, “Do you date?” I looked stunned, “Of course I date.” “When is the last time you had a date?” I thought, “This is the exam for coming into the Foreign Service?” I said, “Last Saturday night, I guess.” “Hmmm,” was the response. “Are you related to Talcott Williams?” “Yes, he is my great uncle.” “He's your great uncle?” Then Green turned to the rest of the board and told them what a great man Talcott Williams was. It turned out that my great uncle, Talcott Williams, had been his patron at the school of Journalism at Columbia University. Green had studied under him. Williams

had an encyclopedic mind, and here is Green telling those who would decide my fate what a great guy he was. And I said to myself, “I guess I've made it.”

Q: I remember when I took the Foreign Service exam...I had gone to Kent School. Since then I had been at Williams and four years in the Air Force and Kent was way away, but a quarter of the exam was talking about Kent.

SEELYE: Really?

Q: Yes. It was a little bit old boyish.

SEELYE: Well, it was old boyish because another one of my Foreign Service friends who went to Princeton told me that Green called him aside before the oral exam to give him some tips.

So anyway, I passed the exam. I mention this in connection with Jordan because after he was appointed as ambassador somebody in personnel said to me, “Green is looking for a political officer, so why don't you go see him?” So I went to see him and he remembered me from the orals panel. That is how I went to Amman.

It was while I was there that I started studying Arabic. I don't know why I did it this way, but there was a nice Palestinian who ran the French language institute. I got him to come to my house twice a week in the evenings. He would give me a phrase in French (he didn't know English) and then recite it in phonetic Arabic. So I started learning Arabic in a half-baked way. While in Amman I requested further training at the FSI Arabic language school.

Q: What was the situation in Amman? You were there from 1952-55.

SEELYE: The situation in what way?

Q: The political structural situation.

SEELYE: In September, 1952, the government was run by a Sovereignty Council which consisted of a triumvirate of three elder statesmen. King Abdullah had been assassinated in 1950 by a Palestinian who resented his collaboration with Israel. His son, Prince Talal was a schizo...There is a schizophrenic syndrome in the Hashemite family that pops up every now and then and it popped up with him. So figuring that he was unfit to rule, the authorities packed Talal off to Turkey. But Talal's eldest son, Hussein, was too young to take over. He was 14 in 1950. So they created the Sovereignty Council consisting of distinguished men in their seventies to run the show. Protocol in those days was terribly formal. On national days and religious holidays, foreign diplomats would go to the palace garbed either in white tie or in morning coat, believe it or not. Fortunately, my father, who was roughly my same size, had both types of garb which I inherited from him. He used them when he was president at St. Lawrence.

In 1953, King Hussein assumed the throne at the age of 17.

Jordan was pretty much a back water then. But on the other hand every now and then it was front and center when incidents involving Israel would occur. At the end of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war Israel annexed territory that separated Palestinian villages from their lands. These were towns like Janin and Galquilya where the municipality was on the Jordanian side of the border but all the town's orchards and cultivated fields spread for miles on the Israeli side. The Palestinian farms could not get used to the idea that they could not go ahead and cultivate their crops and pick their fruit when it was ripe. The land had been in their families for centuries. So this marked the beginning of major incidents. The Israelis would deploy a constabulary along the border to shoot at these farmers when they came across. The farmers would then arm themselves in self-defense and you would begin to have exchange of fire. This was when the Israelis began launching retaliatory raids on the Palestinian villages. The Arab Legion, headed by Glubb was reluctant to become involved because all the senior officers were British. Glubb spoke fluent Arabic and had married a Bedouin woman. He was very popular in Jordan.

These incidents were beginning to escalate and get worse. In 1953, about a year after I got there, Ambassador Green was fired even though his Princeton classmate, Dulles, was Secretary of State. The Charg# in October had gone on leave and I, the political officer and third secretary and still an FSO-6 because of my security problem, became Charg#. There was an economic officer and a station chief at the Embassy.

Q: Station chief being CIA.

SEELYE: And there was also a USIA officer. It was in October that a young Israeli captain by the name of Ariel Sharon, led a cross-border attack against the village of Qibya, wiping out the men, women and children, and demolishing the homes. This was intended as a warning to villagers living along the border to stop going across. Qibya was a cold-blooded massacre. There were other incidents like this while I was in Amman but this was the worst one.

Meanwhile, there was a water problem between Jordan and Israel. The Jordan River ran right between the two. And you had the tributaries and disputes over how to divide up the water. An AID official by the name Miles Bunger proposed building a dam on the Yarmuk River, which is a tributary that runs between Syria and Jordan, for storing water for Jordan. The Israelis were upset at this because it would have deprived them of some water. So this was the beginning of a controversy.

Secretary Dulles came to the region in 1953 to push for some kind of Arab-Israeli settlement, but got nowhere. Then later, the White House in its wisdom decided that the best way to solve the Arab-Israeli problem was to resolve the water problem between Israel and its neighbors. The theory was that if there was agreement regarding sharing the water, everything would fall into place. Of course that was the height of naivete. Anybody knowledgeable about the Arab-Israeli problem knew that it was a political issue and could not be resolved by economic understanding.

The White House appointed Eric Johnston, who was the flamboyant head of the Motion Picture Association to get agreement on water sharing. Obviously he knew that his task wasn't going to be easy because in Amman he convened a private meeting with the embassy officers before going to the Jordanians. Our Charg# that time was Andy Lynch. Johnston asked us for our unvarnished opinions as to what chances we thought he had of selling the plan to the Jordanians. Since he asked for our unvarnished opinions, we gave them. We told him that he didn't have any chance of success but that was a political issue. We noted that while the Jordanians would like to have a fair share of the Jordan water, this wouldn't induce them to make peace. There are other more critical issues. But we added that in our contacts with the Jordanians we would support his effort.

After visiting the concerned countries without success and returning to the U.S. Johnston announced that “the door was still open.” Then he went to the White House...another digression, I don't know if you want me to do this or not...

Q: Go ahead.

SEELYE: ...and said, “The staff in the embassy in Jordan is disloyal. Get rid of them. There are four people I want you to get rid of. [I learned this later.] Lynch (Charg#), Seelye (political officer), Bunger (who conceived of the Yarmuk dam project), and a young CIA clerk who happened to be sitting in on the session we had with Johnston.

Well, the new ambassador to Jordan, who had just been appointed, didn't know any of us. He said, “Look, I need some continuity.” The first thing they did was to pull Lynch out and assign him as Consul General in Newfoundland (to cool off). Bunger was pulled out immediately and transferred somewhere else. This young CIA clerk, being very junior, was ignored. And then I was left. The new ambassador evidently said, “Look, I don't know Seelye, but I have to have somebody who can provide some continuity.” So he saved me. That would have been my second setback in the Foreign Service.

Q: The new ambassador was Lester Mallory?

SEELYE: That's right.

Q: When you were dealing with the Jordanians on this and making your approach, what were you getting as a response?

SEELYE: Well, they were saying, “Look, this is not an economic problem. We would be happy to have the water problem solved, but we have bigger issues than that. We have all these Palestinian refugees sitting in our country. We want them to go back. They should not only be repatriated, but recompensed. We are still resentful of the fact that Israel has taken so much territory because the original partition plan in 1947 gave Israel much less territory. So we think the borders ought to be moved back.” Those were some of the key issues.

Q: Going back to Green. How did he get fired?

SEELYE: Incidentally, when I finally got to know him as an ambassador, I asked him why he asked such mundane questions at the start of the Foreign Service oral exam. I said, “After all, why did you ask me if I dated?” He said, “Don't you know? We want red-blooded officers. One time I interviewed a candidate and I asked him that question and he thought and thought and finally said, 'I think that the last date I had was about a year ago.'” I said, “What happened?” He replied, “I turned him down immediately.”

The main thing that got him fired I think was that every morning between 10:00 and 12:00 he would dictate to his secretary a daily letter to members of his family relating the various events of the day before, what he had done, what Jordanian officials have told him, etc. Instead of sending those letters to the Department, he would send them in unclassified fashion to members of his family. We had a code clerk in Amman who

doubled as security officer. He decided that this was a terrible violation of security and so reported to Washington, D.C. The security people decided that this was too much.

Also Green had alienated the Assistant Secretary for Near East Affairs, Hank Byroade, by opposing Byroade's earlier request to become an FSO-1. Byroade had a hand in getting Green the Ambassadorship to Jordan to get him out of the way. Once in Jordan Green no longer had the power to keep Byroade from becoming a FSO-1. Then Byroade presumably helped “axe” Green from Amman in his Assistant Secretary role.

So those were the two things, I think, that got Green canned. This occurred even though John Foster Dulles had visited Amman just three months before and had assured Green, I think, that we would be staying on.

Q: Speaking of ambassadors, Lester Mallory was a regular Foreign Service Officer wasn't he?

SEELYE: He had been an agricultural attach# who lateraled in.

Q: How did he operate?

SEELYE: Well, he was kind of folksy in his approach. I think having come out of the agricultural service he probably felt he wanted to do things a little differently. He didn't want to act like the elegant, somewhat arrogant Foreign Service Officer of the past, the caricature of Foreign Service officer pre World War II. So I think he leaned over backwards to show that he was down to earth and a democratic American, so to speak. So that was the way he operated in style. I think he was a good ambassador. I think the Jordanians liked him. He got along well with the King, as far as I recall.

Q: First you had this very formal council to deal with. How did you do that as political officer?

SEELYE: First I had Joe Green, who was very formal, to work under and then I had Andy Lynch who was the counselor and then the Charg#, who was also from the old school. Andy Lynch sort of looked like the old type Foreign Service Officer. I got along very well with both Green and Andy Lynch and I think Mallory felt in some respects that I was of the old regime and maybe not totally in sync with his modus operandi. But I did my best by him. He didn't give me the greatest rating, but those things happen.

Q: You were the political officer.

SEELYE: Before I got there there was no political officer. What they did first after the war between Israel and the Arabs in 1948 was to establish a consulate in Amman and Wells Stabler went up there from Jerusalem.

Q: Actually he was an attach#. It wasn't even a consulate, I don't think.

SEELYE: Maybe it wasn't a consulate, but it became a legation. They sent over as minister Gerald Drew, who then took over from Wells. Drew was back in Washington before I went to Amman. I went to see him there. And Drew's deputy was David Fritzlan, who was charg# during the period between Drew's departure and Green's arrival. Fritzlan was political officer in effect as well as counselor of embassy. Joe Green was looking for another body so they gave me the title of political officer. I did political reporting, although I also did other work as well. In fact when the inspector came over he discovered that I had the additional duty of disbursing officer—without any disbursing experience. We had a very, very able disbursing clerk who guided me. In effect, I signed on the basis of his guidance. The inspector decided that I should spend some time in the disbursing office to get the feel for fiscal affairs, which I did.

Q: What would you do as political officer in Jordan during this period?

SEELYE: Well, what I did was, I would visit Jordanian officials and talk to them. I would develop key contacts in certain Arab embassies. I remember the Egyptians had a very

able third or second secretary who I kept in touch with because he had his ear to the ground. The British have always had good Middle East specialists and the French Embassy had an excellent one, so I compared notes with them. Of course I couldn't read the Arab newspapers at that point, but we had translations and I followed the papers very closely. I did what a political officer normally does. I tried to figure out what was going on. We did a lot of reporting on the border crossings. I would go down to Glubb Pasha's headquarters and get the latest information on the latest Israel cross-border attack. I would get their analysis and then we would put in our analysis. And there were times that we would make comments on the Arab-Israeli picture and how we saw things moving or not moving. That sort of thing.

Q: Was there much of a Jordanian administrative apparatus...a foreign ministry, etc.?

SEELYE: There was a foreign ministry. I did develop a particularly good contact with one man in the foreign ministry. In fact, I remember one time I asked him if he was going to be representing the foreign ministry there at a national day affair. He said, “No, I am representing my family.” He happened to come from a Christian family. We all know that it is the extended family that is the nucleus of politics and social life in the Middle East and that statement from him really struck home.

Q: What was the view of King Hussein at that young age?

SEELYE: Well, he was wet behind the ears and I am not sure what his views were at that point. I don't recall that at first we had any real clue as to how he operated or how he really felt. He was just learning the ropes. You could tell that he was a plucky young man. He seemed impressive even then. He had a maturity that seventeen year olds generally don't have. Of course, he had been standing right next to his grandfather when his grandfather was assassinated, so he had gone through quite a bit. I just don't recall any clear feel about how the King operated at that point. I am trying to think. When the Qibyan crisis

came I can't recall what he did or what he said. I am sure he must have made some statements, but I just don't remember that.

Q: I'll come back to this from time to time, but what were you getting from your Foreign Service colleagues, their feelings towards Israel?

SEELYE: I felt very strongly that one should get to Israel as much as possible, so I did. In those days it was not hard to do. I would go to the foreign ministry and say, “I would like to go over to Israel.” They said, “Fine. Just tell us what it is like.” The first time I went I went with my father who was a visiting a former student living in Haifa. You went to the Mandelbaum Gate, which was the separation point between the two countries, and somebody from the Consulate General on the Israeli side would meet your car. You would take off your Jordanian plates and put on Israeli plates. So as soon as you entered Israel nobody knew that you were from Jordan. It was a great way to get a feel for Israel because every soldier hitchhikes.

Now in Israel, certainly since then and maybe then too, if you had diplomatic plates nobody would accept rides. I experienced that later once. But we didn't have diplomatic plates. So you could pick up a young Israeli and talk to him for 20 minutes, half an hour, and get a feel for what things were like and what he thought.

We spent the night with my father's former student in Haifa. We arrived about tea time and his wife was awfully late. She apologized when she arrived and her husband asked her why she was so late. This was 1953. She replied, “Well, because you know I just couldn't bring myself to get on the bus so I walked.” He said, “Why?” “Because of all those dark skinned people.” She was a South African who couldn't bear to sit with Yemen Jews.

So that was the first time I went to Israel. I went over with my wife another time to visit friends at the consulate in Haifa. Another time my wife and I went to take a little three-day vacation in Askkelon, south of Haifa. We did the same thing. We got permission from the

foreign ministry, went over and changed plates, and drove around. So at the time I felt it was necessary for us to visit Israel because of the risk of getting a one-sided perspective.

How the other officers felt? I didn't sense any anti-Israeli feelings or anything like that. I remember being upset at what the Israelis were doing to the Jordanian villagers. That probably started to color our views about Israel, I am sure. Before that I think our views toward Israel were a little more favorable.

Q: What was the view of Iraq and Syria at that time, from the Jordanian perspective?

SEELYE: In those days, of course, Iraq had a monarchy, a cousin of King Hussein. So relations were close. I don't recall many exchanges of visits, but I am sure there were some. But the relations with Syria were not so close, even though Jordan and Syria historically and sociologically and ethnically were one and the same. The whole eastern region that we call the Levant, which is now Lebanon, Israel, Syria, and Jordan, was known geographically as Bilace as-Shan, which means the area evolving around Damascus, around Syria. Syrian families are related to Jordanian families and Palestinian families. So there was a lot of commonality there. But there was the political angle. You had a succession of coup d'etats in Syria. While I was in Jordan the Syrian President was Shishakli, but he was a dictator and the Jordanians were apprehensive about him. Then he was followed by a couple of others while I was there. I felt that relations were correct, but not terribly warm. I think there was the lingering hope expressed by King Abdullah for the creation of a greater Syria. As you know the King of Syria at one point had been Faisal. He was later deposed and the British put him on the throne in Baghdad...Abdullah wanted to take his place in Damascus. The reason he settled for Transjordan was that he saw this as a stepping stone to taking over Damascus as well and creating a greater Syria. So from the Syrian vantage point there was a lot of suspicion about the monarchy in Jordan.

Q: What were American interests in Jordan at the time?

SEELYE: As time went on American interests in Jordan became more acute. The U.S. saw Jordan as kind of a linchpin on Israel's border. It was a stable country, a conservative country, a country that the U.S. felt could eventually work with Israel in a peace settlement. This, of course, became much more applicable later as radical socialist regimes came to power in Syria and contrasted with a more stable Jordan government. Therefore, our interests in Jordan became more evident, I guess. But at the time, I don't think we felt we had a great national interest in Jordan. It was a small place. At that point the British were supplying the subsidies and not us. So I didn't sense any great U.S. national interest and I don't think Washington did, at that point. The U.S. national interest has developed over time with tensions in the area and the solid, pro-American role the King played.

Q: Was there much of an attempt to settle the large number of Palestinians who had left Israel?

SEELYE: Jordan was the only Arab country that automatically gave every Palestinian Jordanian citizenship, as you know. Lebanon gave Lebanese citizenship only to the Christian Palestinians because the Lebanese were afraid of disrupting the balance between Moslems and Christians by having too many Moslems. Most of the Palestinians were Moslem. Other countries were selective. Even Egypt was selective. Jordan gave all Palestinians citizenship. Now this doesn't mean necessarily that they were all immediately treated equal. A lot of them came into the government, because the Palestinians are very bright and able and qualified. In fact, I saw a report recently that indicated that there are more Palestinians per capita with graduate degrees than Israelis. The Israeli's being a small minority discriminated against, have developed the urge to excel. The Palestinians have developed that same kind of bent. If the Palestinians were to tap their own best people, they would do very well in running their own country. Of course, there are quite a few Palestinians in refugee camps (that we serviced by UNRWA). Educated Palestinians have become doctors and lawyers and have been integrated into the societies in which they live. They also serve in governments. At first Palestinians serving in state government

were slightly discriminated against. The same thing is true of groups who do not come from the right part of a country, or right tribe. But as time has gone on Palestinians have become integral to such governments as in Jordan. But in my day most of the key people in the Jordan government were Jordanians, and the Palestinians were just beginning to move into key positions. The head of the foreign ministry, however, was a Palestinian. He was from a very distinguished family from Jerusalem. We found the Palestinians quite congenial because they were in general better educated than the Jordanians.

Q: The West Bank was part of Jordan at that time?

SEELYE: Yes. When the war broke out between the Arabs and Israel, King Abdullah ordered the Arab Legion to move onto the West Bank, which had been part of Palestine. So they did and they established a line of defense under Glubb Pasha. It was a sensitive position for the British to be in because Glubb Pasha and his key officers were English. But the Arab Legion retreated from two places called Lydda and Ranle because Hagganah, the Jewish militia, wanted to obtain more territory and have more space inland from the sea. The Arab Legion agreed to withdraw. So even after the cease-fire and the war was over, the Arab Legion pulled back several miles, for which the Jordanians have never been forgiven by many Palestinians. But Jordan did hang on to one half of Jerusalem, known as the Arab sector. Abdullah then annexed the West Bank, but there were only two countries that ever formally endorsed that annexation—one was Pakistan. Nobody else formally recognized it. Nevertheless, Jordan, as a country including the West Bank, was recognized diplomatically. So in a sense we did de facto recognize Jordan's acquisition of the West Bank.

Q: Were the Palestinian refugees under pressure from agitators to get out?

SEELYE: In those days not very much. Their conditions were not very good. I don't recall Palestinian demonstrations while I was there. My memory may fail me. I do recall, however, a demonstration by a militant, fundamentalist group, which is interesting in

light of events of today. It shows that Islamic fundamentalism goes back quite a ways. The demonstration happened when I went out to the airport to meet one of the few congressional delegations that visited Jordan during my tour. We rode in cars with embassy diplomatic plates and happened to pass by a mosque just after Friday prayers. The Imam had apparently been giving a political diatribe and as these people poured out of the mosque they suddenly saw Americans. So they picked up some stones and started throwing them at us. We managed to get away. One congressman sitting in the car said to me, “By the time these stones get back to the States they will be big rocks.” This was an organization that was called the Ikhwan, a hard-line, militant Islamic organization. So I became aware of that way back then, but I don't remember anything else of that nature. In those days the Palestinians were not that political. You could talk to any educated Palestinian and he would gripe about having lost his lands, etc., but I didn't sense then that their was a political Palestinian movement. That movement really developed in an active way with Arafat.

Q: Two days ago the Israelis and the PLO signed a peace accord, an historic piece of paper, a major stride.

SEELYE: So the politicization of the Palestinians didn't really occur until after I left Jordan. Arafat was the one in the sixties who really built up the political movement. I don't recall that there was Palestinian militancy in my days.

Q: Then you left there and they finally got you into Arabic training...1955-56.

SEELYE: I finally got my Arabic training after hopefully having cleared up my security problem. I went to Beirut and arrived just at the time that they were about to fold up the Arabic Language School. There were money problems. So they hadn't appointed a regular class. Instead they had taken me out of Amman, and a colleague out of Baghdad, Carl Walstrom. They figured that since I had studied some Arabic on my own in Jordan and he had studied some on his own somewhere else, we could go there in place of a whole

class. So there was no head of the institute. There was one wonderful person there who was the anthropologist, Kep Lewis, who was acting head. He was just a terrific guy. Kep pretty much let us go about learning Arabic the way we wanted. Both of us were well motivated and he let us work things out with our instructors. In retrospect, I think I made a mistake in focusing so much on the spoken Arabic, which I thought was of overriding importance because it enabled one to deal with people in a community. You could always get somebody to translate something for you that had been written. So I went overboard on spoken Arabic. I could have learned more in terms of writing and reading, although I learned a certain amount. And unfortunately in those days they taught the colloquial Lebanese.

Q: Where does colloquial Lebanese fit in?

SEELYE: Arabic colloquial in one country differs from that in another. The closer you get to the Arabian Peninsula, the closer you get to the classical Arabic in the spoken language. After a year in Beirut I was assigned to Kuwait and during my four and a half years there I tried to get rid of my Lebanese dialect and accent.

Q: Did you have much contact with the embassy at the time?

SEELYE: Oh, yes. We actually saw quite a bit of the embassy officers in Beirut on social occasions. I played on the embassy softball team. I think we were formally assigned to the embassy for diplomatic purposes. So we didn't feel out of things. The embassy was very good about including us. While I was very motivated to study Arabic I couldn't really take more than four or five hours a day of intensive Arabic, so I enjoyed the tennis courts of Beirut and took my kids to the beach. This was one of the dividends of language training, although studying a tough language like Arabic was demanding.

Q: Did you get any lectures on the Arab world and that sort of thing?

SEELYE: You mean at Beirut?

Q: Yes, at Beirut.

SEELYE: We would monitor some lectures given at AUB. One of the professors there, Zein Nurrdin Zein, lectured on Islamic history. So we used to attend his lectures once or twice a week. You mean lecturing on the Middle East?

Q: Yes.

SEELYE: No, not in Beirut. Everybody there was pretty much a Middle East hand.

Q: Were the wives getting any Arabic?

SEELYE: They were not offered any Arabic at U.S. government expense in those days. My wife had two little kids and really had her hands full. They did later on, as you know, but in those days they didn't. Strangely enough earlier in Germany there was money available for her to study German. But not in Beirut. Later on she did have the opportunity to study Arabic in Kuwait and in Saudi Arabia.

Q: But there were only two language students while you were there?

SEELYE: Yes. Near the end of our tour there, a class did come in after a year of Arabic language study in the U.S. I finished there in March, 1956 and that class came in February. So it had two full years.

Q: You left and went right to Kuwait?

SEELYE: Yes, directly to Kuwait. We drove to Kuwait.

Q: I have you there from 1956-60.

SEELYE: Yes, that's right.

Q: What were you doing there?

SEELYE: I was assigned there first as vice consul. There were two officers there, consul and vice consul. Bill Brewer was the consul. The consulate had not been opened that long. I think we opened it in 1951, something like that. So my job was economic reporting, consular work (the only consular job I ever had in the Service), and other odds and ends including administrative tasks. I was vice consul there from March, 1956 until I went on home leave in April, 1957—for one year. Shortly before I left I got a message from Washington saying they were going to appoint me to be consul, to take Bill Brewer's place. So I went on home leave and came back to be consul in June, 1957 and was full consul there until I left in July, 1960.

Q: What was Kuwait? Was Kuwait an independent country?

SEELYE: No, it was not independent yet. Kuwait did not get independence until the year after I left. It was a British dependency. As you know, around the Gulf the British had political agents who ran foreign affairs and defense for these sheikhdoms, which were really nothing more than village states made important by their oil. So the British political agent had an important job and a lot of stature. In Kuwait he had been the only foreign representative until 1951, when the Gulf Oil Company (which had originally gotten the concession but was forced to share it with BP, half and half) said to the British, “Look, we need some American representation here. Our people need their passports renewed, some help with guys who get in trouble, etc.” Well, the British, I understand, resisted this for some time until Herbert Hoover, Jr., who was then Deputy Under Secretary of State, weighed in heavily. The British agreed to the establishment of an American consulate. So we had the only other foreign representative there besides the British political agent.

We had very close relations with the British political agent. I used to see him at least once a week to compare notes. And then there were American and British at the Kuwait Oil Company in Ahmadi, which is 25 miles away. While I was there, unfortunately, a lot of

social life revolved around Ahmadi. They often had a lot of oil visitors and we would be invited down. So we spent a lot of time going back and forth.

But Kuwait was small enough in those days that you really got to know Kuwaiti families. When we arrived there was still a mud wall around Kuwait. The consulate was located outside the mud wall on the water. Our building was an old building with thick walls made of coral rock and covered with mud. The roof was made of palm fronds and mud. Of course, when it rained in the winter you were constantly trying to plug leaks. It was a stately old-style house. We lived in one part of the house and the offices were in the other part of the house. There was just a desert track leading out to it, there was no road. The closest wall gate to the consulate was about a mile away. So we had to go out of our way to go into town. While we regretted the tearing down of the wall, from a practical standpoint it made it a lot easier for us to get to town.

Q: July 14, 1958, the Iraqi revolution. What happened to you all?

SEELYE: It had some personal impact on us because we had entertained at our house a few days before a couple of American businessmen who were among those who were pulled out of a Baghdad hotel and put into a truck—where a mob grabbed them and tore them to pieces. The Kuwaitis were not that unhappy with the Iraqi revolution, strangely enough. I remember once just before that sitting in the VIP lounge at the airport waiting the return of the ruler. Whenever the ruler traveled you went out to say goodby and then again to welcome him back. His nephew, Sheik Jabir al-Ahmad, who is now the ruler, was then head of security in Ahmadi and he was sitting next to me. I mentioned the fact that I heard there were some problems in Iraq and trusted that the monarchy wasn't in trouble. He gave me the finger-across-the-neck gesture and implied that it was time for it to go. While it is true that Kuwait was very much a microcosm of Arabism—there were many Palestinians and Egyptians living there—you still had a kind of monarchy in Kuwait. Yet, the Kuwaitis were apparently not too unhappy with what happened to the monarchy in Iraq. Of course the British were unhappy and we were unhappy. A few days later the

U.S. Marines landed in Beirut. That made things a little dicey. We were concerned that there would be reverberations in Kuwait against the U.S. There was a lot of pro-Nasserism sentiment in Kuwait and ostensibly, we had moved into Lebanon to arrest the expansion of Nasserism. So the British political agent put some Kuwaiti troops around the consulate, though in retrospect that probably was not necessary.

Q: I was down in Dhahran and kept looking out our door waiting for that mob to come along, but nothing happened.

SEELYE: We never had mob action in Kuwait.

Q: Going back a bit, there was the 1956 war, were you in Kuwait at the time?

SEELYE: Yes.

Q: This was the October 1956 war, really the Suez crisis. Did that impact on you?

SEELYE: Yes it did and particularly on the British there, of course. It impacted favorably on me because Eisenhower had intervened and told the British they should pull back. I was really the shining light at that point. The poor British political agent was, of course, the fall guy. I will never forget, we were sitting next to each other at some kind of celebration. The Kuwaiti Minister of Education was also there. At one point a mock battle was staged showing guerrillas attacking the British at Suez. At this point the British political agent stood up and walked out. The strongly pro-U.S. sentiment didn't last too long, of course. But it was nice to enjoy the favorable light for a while.

Q: What was your impression of the Sabah family there? Their ability to do things?

SEELYE: I had great admiration and esteem for the then ruler, Abdullah al-Salem al-Sabah. He assured that the oil revenues were spread around. With all this money suddenly flowing in, it could have been misspent. But the ruler devised a gimmick to enable the money to be spread out. All the land belonged to the Sabah family. He would

designate parcels of land that people could obtain for practically nothing. Then, of course, as the place boomed the value of that land escalated, enabling the land to be sold at tremendous profit. That was the basic way that oil revenues were spread around. Also the ruler was very enlightened in the way he created excellent schools. Money was no object in building these schools. Five big Kuwaiti firms with five British partners did all the school construction at 20 percent cost plus. Also hospitals were built with British staffs. They brought in mainly Egyptian teachers to the schools. Every Kuwaiti got a free education and free medical care. No Kuwaiti had money worries. Everything was handed to a Kuwaiti on a silver platter.

At the time we thought this was great. In retrospect, of course, it spoiled the Kuwaitis and contributed, in my view, to the Iraqi-Kuwaiti war. It wouldn't have happened if the Kuwaitis had handled things right, but that is another story.

Abdullah al-Salem al-Sabah was a man of simple tastes. He, himself, didn't take much money. He was smart enough to set Kuwait on a very positive course. Now to what extent the British had a role in influencing him, I don't know. They may have.

Q: Were we pretty much observers there?

SEELYE: Totally observers. Of course I got to know key Kuwaiti figures. The general manager of the oil company on the spot was an American, the overall manager came out of London. The American general manager was very, very fair, and had a good reputation. His name was L.T. Jordan.

Q: Around this time I was in Dhahran and ARAMCO was running things. ARAMCO was for the time extremely enlightened in bringing the Saudis into the business, whereas you go over to the island of Bahrain a few miles where the British there were trying to keep the Bahrainis down. How were things being done in Kuwait?

SEELYE: You are right, ARAMCO set a fine example. KOC, the Kuwait Oil Company, came after ARAMCO, so they were somewhat influenced by ARAMCO. However, ARAMCO was in an eastern province where there was no infrastructure and the government in Jeddah was so far away it couldn't care less. So ARAMCO felt there was a need to create hospitals and schools. KOC didn't have to do anything like that because the Kuwaiti government was doing it itself. KOC provided for Kuwaitis working for the oil company.

Q: Were they bringing in Kuwaitis as managers?

SEELYE: Not when I was there because there weren't any Kuwaitis qualified at that point. I remember when the first Kuwaiti came back from getting a petroleum engineering degree and was so proud of it that his card indicated that he was the first Kuwaiti to have a degree as a petroleum engineer. But he wanted to sit at his desk and pontificate rather than go out into the oil fields and get his hands dirty. So, while I was there there were no Kuwaitis in upper management. Most were British or American.

Q: How did the Kuwaitis look at the Shah and Iran?

SEELYE: Kuwait has an element in its population of Iranian extraction that goes back a hundred years or more. It came down from southern Iran, which is known as Khuzestan, which was more Arab than Persian for many years. So many of these Iranians who have been in Kuwait for a hundred years are of Arab stock. Nevertheless, they are known as Iranians because they came from Iran. I sensed in Kuwait an anti-Iranian sentiment. While many of the Kuwaiti merchants of Iranian origin were successful and wealthy and seemed to be accepted, nevertheless, if you talked privately to a Kuwait from the old stock, he would grumble about these “ajamis.” “Ajami” in Arabic means foreigner, but in Kuwait it meant Iranians. So I sensed then an anti-Iranian sentiment there which I am afraid remains.

Also, Iranians came in illegally to be used for unskilled labor. They did a lot of the dirty work. The British, who were running the show, were pro-Shah. I didn't sense among the Kuwaiti officials any resentment or antipathy against the Shah. The Kuwaiti anti-Iranian sentiment was directed at the people.

Q: Well, then I thought we might call it quits at this point. Next time we will pick you up when you came back to Washington.

SEELYE: Sure.

Q: Today is December 1, 1993. You left Kuwait in 1960. We have you coming to NEA where you served from 1960-64.

SEELYE: Correct

Q: What were you doing there?

SEELYE: For the first year I was an assistant desk officer. The principal desk officer for Jordan-Iraq was Carl Walstrom, and I came in as the number two. I was that for about a year and then Hermann Eilts departed from being desk officer for Arabian Peninsula affairs. I took over from him for three years.

Q: The Arabian Peninsula affairs in those days consisted of what?

SEELYE: It consisted of the whole Arabian Peninsula including Yemen, all the Gulf countries and Kuwait. In addition we had a very odd and interesting responsibility because Hermann Eilts was such an incredibly able and talented individual that they had assigned him responsibility for UNRWA as well. That was the United Nations relief organization that was set up to take care of the refugees. That responsibility normally fitted in the Bureau of International Organization Affairs. But both because of its Middle East nature and

Hermann's presence there UNRWA affairs was given to the office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs. So I took over that responsibility, which was a very unusual marriage of issues.

Q: To go back to the first year you were there.

SEELYE: Then I was dealing with Jordan and Iraq.

Q: What were the issues in the 1960-61 period?

SEELYE: Well, in Iraq, of course, it was in the aftermath of the 1958 revolution when the Hashemite monarch was overthrown. Abd al-Karim Qasim had taken over. I think he was still in power throughout my tenure. It was a difficult time for the U.S. because obviously we had had a very close relationship with the Iraqi monarchy. Thereafter, our relations eroded. We still had a presence there, we had an ambassador there, but it was not a happy relationship.

As far as Jordan is concerned, of course the King was increasingly establishing himself. He came in in 1953 when I was in Jordan. It took him a while to get established. By 1960-61, I think he was pretty confident in his role as king. I don't recall any difficulties or crises in that period which affected our relationship.

Q: Well, we must have been thinking all the time, particularly after the July, 1958 business in Baghdad, of what would happen if King Hussein was assassinated or overthrown. Was this so?

SEELYE: Well, of course, that is over thirty years ago. I didn't sense that the King was at risk in the 1960's. Of course, in the late fifties there was an effort by the military to overthrow King Hussein. I have a feeling that by 1960-61, things had settled down. I don't recall our being concerned at that point about the king's tenure. I think it was a fairly calm period.

Q: Were we watching the Palestinians? They seemed to be everywhere throughout Saudi Arabia, where I was, running things.

SEELYE: Well, at that point in time, the PLO had not yet become militant. At that point the Palestinians were tame. Obviously any Palestinian that you talked to had very deep grievances and he articulated them, but there was not an active organized political movement. In those days the PLO existed as an office at the UN in New York. There was a man by the name of Ahmad Shukein who used to give long-winded speeches attacking Israel. But he was a one-man show. There were the refugees in the camps, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, you had well-off Palestinians who were becoming integrated into the Jordanian leadership and society. But Palestinian political consciousness was not reflected in any institutional way.

Q: Moving to the Arabian Peninsula where you were from 1961-64, what were the main concerns?

SEELYE: Well, the first concern—and that happened soon after I took over—was the crisis in Kuwait, just after Kuwait established independence. I left Kuwait about a year before it established independence. The crisis occurred when Abd al-Karim Qasim pounded the table and said, “Kuwait cannot be independent. Kuwait is an historical part of the Iraqi homeland and I, Abd al-Karim Qasim will not tolerate it.” He began to beat the drums. This created a lot of tensions in the area. Iraq pretended to mobilize its troops and the press thought that the Iraqis were deploying troops along the Kuwaiti border. This was not, however, the case. We knew that from our intelligence. Iraq had not moved its troops that far, but Qasim made it look as if that were the case. So the British moved in some troops to help defend Kuwait. Then, because that was not considered the most desirable thing for the Kuwait government to do—here was an Arab country just independent turning to the British, the “imperialists”—and whereby the Arab Legion peacekeeping force was

brought in to provide an Arab cover. This was intended to deter Qasim from rolling across the border.

And I recall being called into the Assistant Secretary's office, at that time it was Phil Talbot. The front office was very concerned about the possibility of Iraq's moving into Kuwait. I pointed out that in the first place we didn't have any information that Iraq had that many troops mobilized. Furthermore, I described the nature of the road between Basra and Kuwait, which was then still a dirt track. I had just traveled it myself the year before. And I said that that would impede a rapid response and that in any case we would have enough advance warning. And in those days, as you may remember, desk officers were not allowed to be appointed desk officers to any country unless they had served in that country. My knowledge of that road was later cited as an example of why one should serve in a country before becoming a desk officer.

Q: And it is handy. Today we are talking about intervention in Bosnia. Well, I was a consul in Bosnia, and I am thinking, "Oh, my God."

SEELYE: Well, I think these young desk officers resigning over Bosnia who have been in the Foreign Service only a few years and have never served in the country is regretful.

Q: But it is interesting that those were the ground rules and it does make a difference.

SEELYE: So that was the Kuwait crisis and I remember...

Q: Were we saying that this was a British job?

SEELYE: We were saying it was a British job. We had no intentions of getting involved. It was a big issue at the UN and I remember going into IO, where Joe Sisco was then in charge of the office, and we all sat around and listened to the report from the UN on the deliberations and the condemnations of Iraq. Then the crisis calmed down. I remember the Gulf Oil Company coming in and being quite concerned, because it had a

50 percent interest in the oil of Kuwait. That was the first crisis that I remember coming to our attention at the Arabian Peninsula office.

I remember that during the Kuwaiti crisis journalists attached to the State Department wanted to know all about Kuwait. So Al Simms, who was then our regional public affairs officer, asked me if I would address them. I said, “Sure, I have some slides.” So I gave a slide lecture which I put together with the help of the media people upstairs. I showed what Kuwait was like and answered various questions. And for that I remember getting a very nice letter that Al Simms wrote to my file about this. In those days, remember, everybody thought it important to have letters of commendation in their files...

Of course Saudi Arabia was the pivotal country in the Peninsula and the country we focused most of our time on. At that point there was an uneasy period in Saudi Arabia because the successor to the great Abdul Aziz was King Saud the prodigal son. Saud was not very intelligent and administered the treasury haphazardly. I remember how, during some crisis in the Middle East, he offered the Syrians $2 million as a political bribe. It was recognized that his continued tenure would lead to an erosion of the situation in Saudi Arabia. We were worried. In 1961 he fell ill, and he came to the Peter Brent Brigham hospital in Boston for treatment. He suffered from very serious ailments including galloping syphilis.

Despite Saud's flaws we of course realized that we had to pay some attention to him while in the U.S. I remember sending Andy Killgore up to call on him. I was dealing with the Saudi Ambassador, Abdullah Khaggal, concerning the King's presence here. The King was of the view that being head of state, who happened to be in the United States for medical reasons, the president of the country in which he was being treated medically should call on him first. At that point our President was Jack Kennedy. The plan was that once the King got out of the hospital he would have a period of recuperation in this country. They had first planned on sending him out West some place.

Wanting to satisfy Saudi protocol, I investigated at the White House whether it would be possible for the President—who was going to Hyannis Port for weekends at the time—to swing by the Peter Brent Brigham Hospital. I was told that this was impossible. The President wouldn't take time out to do this. So the next question was how could we create a situation whereby with a minimum of effort the President could call on the King. This would salve the King's pride and enable the King to accept a Presidential invitation to have a meal with him at the White House. It was agreed that Saudi Arabia was important enough to us that the President should meet with him at the White House. But the King would not go to the White House until the President called upon him. That was the problem.

As the weeks went by I noted that Kennedy was now going to Palm Beach and maybe we could persuade the Saudis to induce the King to recuperate in Palm Beach rather than out West. They thought that was a good idea and they were able to find a house belonging to Merriweather Post, which they rented for a month. The King went down to Palm Beach. Then I talked to Angier Biddle Duke, who was head of protocol and a close friend of Kennedy's. I noted that it was only fifteen minutes from the President's house to the Post house. A fifteen minute visit by Kennedy was all that was necessary and then a dinner at the White House could be set up. As it turned out the White House reluctantly agreed.

When the King got down there it was agreed that Kennedy would call on him, let's say on a Monday morning. I took a White House back-up plane to Palm Beach to be present during this meeting. A day or so before that meeting I had dinner with the King. The meeting the next day was set up. Angier Biddle Duke went to pick up Kennedy and as he told me later, Kennedy kept saying, “What am I doing calling on this guy?” Duke, who was a pretty good man said, “Well, I understand that this is very important to the Saudis from a protocol standpoint, it is part of their cultural requirements and we have to be sensitive to that.” So they arrived and Kennedy came into the living room and the King, who was

a big man, about 6'4", wore dark glasses that were very narrow. He was very somber looking. Normally when the President is meeting with a foreign dignitary there is a State Department interpreter. In those days it was Camille Nowfal. But since this was just a courtesy call, with no substance to be discussed, there seemed no point in sending a special interpreter down from the State Department. So an aide to the King, who was a very distinguished Palestinian with Saudi nationality, was to do the interpreting. His name was Jamal Husseini from the famous Husseini family from Jerusalem.

The exchange of conversation starts. The President says, "Your Majesty I am looking forward to seeing you in Washington next week. It will be a great pleasure for me." And the King responds, "Inshallah." The interpreter translated the Arabic word literally and said, "God willing." You should have seen the President's startled face. You could see what was going through his mine. "I am going out of my way to meet this s.o.b., and I am saying how nice it is to meet him and all he says is 'God willing'". So that didn't start the meeting off too well. It was a lesson that most professional interpreters understand. They try to translate the cultural context of what a person says. What the interpreter should have said was, "I am looking forward with great pleasure to meeting you at the White House Mr. President, God willing," which is supposedly what the King meant. Anyway, they had about a fifteen minute exchange and that was that.

Okay, the King comes to Washington later. He was to meet the President at the White House for a luncheon. The White House didn't want to bother having a dinner for him. The Saudi Ambassador, however, was very stubborn and said to me that it could not be a lunch because this was Ramadan, which was the month of fasting. And as you know, you cannot eat during the month of fasting. I said, "Mr. Ambassador, there are two exceptions to the fasting requirement: one is if you are ill, and the King is ill. Two, if you are in travel status, and the King is in travel status. So both of these exceptions would enable the King, it seems to me, to accept a luncheon invitation." "No," said the Saudi Ambassador, "not at all." So I had to go back to the White House and tell them that a lunch was impossible.

Q: When you say go to the White House whom were you talking to?

SEELYE: I'm trying to remember. I am sure it was some low level official.

Q: You must have gotten the rolling eyes and "you again."

SEELYE: Yes. I have forgotten who it was. Well, they finally agreed to have a dinner.

First there was a morning meeting between the King and the President and each side agreed who would attend that meeting. The Saudis said that their side would consist of the King, the ambassador and I think one other. On our side there would be the President, an interpreter, me and somebody from the White House staff. As we went into the room there was a journalist attached to the Saudi party who walked in with the Saudi delegation. I thought to myself, "Well, it is up to the Saudis to indicate who they want in the meeting. It is not for me to tell the journalist not to come, although he is not on the list." Well, it turned out that during the meeting the King was quite disturbed by the presence of this Saudi journalist. The King was sitting let's say where you are and then opposite was Jack Kennedy in his rocking chair. I was sitting next to and slightly behind Kennedy with my note pad. Behind me was this journalist. During the conversation the King kept looking in my direction. Actually he was looking in the direction of the journalist. After about two or three minutes, the President turned to me and said quietly, "I think your note-taking is disturbing the King, you ought to put your pad away." I said, "Okay." So I had to put my pad away for the rest of the hour because the President thought that the King was disturbed by my note-taking, but he was obviously disturbed by the journalist. I don't recall anything of extraordinary substance that was revealed at that meeting. I think it was a fairly tame exchange.

Q: Was the King a pivotal figure as far as making decisions or was he being bypassed by the apparatus?

SEELYE: I don't think he was a pivotal figure at all. Faisal, his brother, the Crown Prince and the Foreign Minister, was the pivotal decision maker. But the King would often go off half-cocked over Faisal's head and that was the problem. As far as our interests in Saudi Arabia were concerned, we were hoping for a change. The doctors at Peter Brent Brigham Hospital had told us that the King didn't have more than six months to live. Actually he lived another couple of years.

So a dinner was planned. I pointed out to the White House that, of course, the Saudis do not consume liquor because it is against their religion. I assumed, therefore, that no liquor would be served. A couple of people who were invited to the dinner party were American businessmen who were concerned with the Middle East (one was Terry Duce who used to be a big figure with ARAMCO) and the other was Kermit Roosevelt. They both called me to see if liquor was going to be served and I said, “No.” So they tanked up.

We arrive at the White House and here are these trays with big tumblers full of pure Scotch on the rocks. Later on I was told by the White House that since Saudis insisted on a dinner, it would entertain its way. Okay. Terry Duce and Kermit Roosevelt ended up in their cups. On leaving the White House I had to help both of them out. That obviously is not the main point of the story.

Liquor was being served and the Saudi Ambassador was absolutely irate. He took me aside and said, “How can you do this to us?” I said, “Mr. Ambassador, when we are in your country we always try to be very sensitive to your culture, your habits and your rituals. We may not agree with them, but we honor them. And I hope you will be generous and sensitive enough to honor our customs.” But he was still upset.

The table arrangement at the dinner was sort of a horseshoe design with tables at right angles. I was down at one end and sitting next to me was Angier Biddle Duke, head of protocol. There were a few Foreign Service officers who knew Arabic sitting behind the guests to help interpret if necessary. At one point the President was not speaking with

the King. The King was talking to the person on his right, who was Dean Rusk. Lyndon Johnson, the Vice President, was sitting somewhere else. Between courses, Duke would nudge me and say, “The President can't talk to Prince so-and-so on his left. Why don't you go up and help him a bit.” So I got up and stood behind and between the President and a very dour prince. I introduced myself to the President and said, “Can I help interpret for you with this gentleman?” The President looked at me and said, “Who are you?” I said, “Well, I happen to be the desk officer for Arabian Peninsula Affairs.” “Oh,” he said, “tell me about the background of the King and Saudi Arabia.” I told him a little bit about how his father had united all these tribes and the country. He said, “That is very interesting. Tomorrow call my secretary, Evelyn Lincoln, and give her the name of a good book I can read on Saudi Arabia on this period.” I said, “I have a couple in mind and I will call her.” At that point the next course came so I sat down.

There was another break and this time Dean Rusk was left alone, so I went up to him and said, “Can I help you with your partner?” He looked interested and so I helped interpret. Then I sat down. Between the final courses I noticed Lyndon Johnson over in a corner. He had a Saudi next to him and there was no conversation going on because the Saudi didn't speak any English. I went to the Vice President and asked, “Mr. Vice President, may I help you interpret with this gentleman here? The Vice President gave me a look as if to say, “Who the hell do you think you are? and turned away. He obviously didn't want any help; he didn't want to speak to the guy anyway.

During the dinner milk was served to the Saudi entourage and during his remarks the President made a crack to the effect that never had so much milk been consumed at a state affair. Again, after the dinner was over, the Saudi Ambassador buttonholed me once more and I said, “Look, you have to consider that this is what the White House wanted to do and they did it. As far as I can see, Mr. Ambassador, everything went off very well. The Saudi officials seemed to be very pleased.” Then I discovered, shortly thereafter, from a very reliable source, that the King, himself, was polishing off a bottle of brandy a day. It had all started a year or two before when he was seriously ill and his private aide, a man

named Id bin Salem, had prescribed a shot of what the King thought was medicine. He took it and liked it and it made him feel better. So he took more and more. As a result he used to keep a bottle of brandy under his mattress in the hospital while he was in Boston. So I thought that was a supreme irony: the Saudi Ambassador's insisting that no liquor could be served and the King is sitting there at the dinner wishing that he could have some of that whisky or brandy, I am sure. So that is just an amusing anecdote.

About a year or so later the King was deposed, pushed aside, and in anticipation of the Crown Prince Faisal taking over, he was invited to the States. This time the President gave a lunch. We asked Isa Sabbagh, then assigned to our Embassy in Jeddah as PAO, to return to the U.S. to be the interpreter. Isa is a unique individual with a tremendous fluency in Arabic and English and with a great knowledge of Saudi Arabia. He was one of our really supreme interpreters who could really bring two individuals together by understanding the context of a conversation as well as respective cultures. So I told the White House that we were bringing Isa back to interpret. And the White House said, “Fine.” I was a little worried because Isa is not just an interpreter, and he was particularly sensitive to the fact that he was more than an interpreter. I reminded the White House that we were bringing back a senior Embassy official, the Public Affairs Officer, whom the Saudis liked and greatly respected. The White House said, “Well, that is nice, but, of course, he will have to sit behind the President and the Crown Prince.” I said, “Well, you know, I don't think we can do this because Isa is a man of stature and I think we should really make an effort to put him at the table.” “No, we can't possibly put him at the table.” And our own protocol said the same.

So I thought to myself, “Well, I will go through the motions.” When Isa arrived I called him into my office and said, “Isa, I am afraid the White House has a hard and fast rule. Those who interpret for the President have to, without exception, sit not at the table.” At which point Isa, who has a distinguished-looking goatee, drew himself up and said, “In that case,

I won't do it." There was a pause and I said, "You're right. I thought you would say that and I am going to go back to the White House again."

So I went back to the White House and said, "You know, this guy is important. If you want him to interpret, you will have to put him at the table. Otherwise he won't do it and we won't force him to. I understand why he won't because it would demean him in the eyes of the Saudis, who esteem him greatly. It wouldn't look right to his relations with Saudi officials, and I personally feel strongly that he should be at the table." So after much grumbling they put him at the table.

So Isa sat at the table not far from the Crown Prince and the President. He didn't get much to eat, but he was close enough so that he could interpret. His face was saved with the Saudis. Isa will tell the story in a book he is writing.

Q: I must say the people at the White House must have detested the thought of the Saudis doing anything with you because you were...

SEELYE: I know.

Q: Was there a change in relations when Faisal was there?

SEELYE: We had a good relationship with Faisal already. He had as his special assistant a man by the name of Omar Saqqaf, who later became his foreign minister. The embassy dealt a lot with him. Faisal had a strong attachment to the United States. We were quite pleased, of course, when the family got together and deposed the King because of his illness and his poor leadership. When Faisal came in he not only improved the U.S.-Saudi relationship, but he also took Saudi Arabia out of its doldrums. Saudi Arabia had been in the red financially despite the oil revenues. The new King began to bring things together. So the whole relationship became more upbeat and more satisfactory after that.

Q: An extremely important problem was the relationship of Saudi Arabia with Nasser who was still in his acme pretty much at that point.

SEELYE: The next crisis we had was the Yemeni crisis. In 1962 a revolution occurred overthrowing the Hamid al-Din regime. Imam Ahmad had died a few months before that and his son, Prince Badr, had taken over. The so-called revolutionaries decided that this change afforded an opportunity to overthrow this very oppressive regime, a regime that felt education would not be desirable for its people because that would force the regime to make some major changes that would threaten the regime.

I remember visiting Yemen in 1961 and at that point the capital was Ta'iz, not Sanaa, the traditional capital. The capital was at Ta'iz because there had been a split in the ruling family and one branch of the family had fled to Ta'iz and had moved the government there. At the top of a hill overlooking Ta'iz was a big building. I was told that there was where the Imam kept the sons of all the tribal leaders as hostages so that they wouldn't rise up against him. So that was the kind of regime that you had there. You walked around Ta'iz and you saw what looked like a prison and the doors were all open because each one of the prisoners had a tremendous iron ball chained to his ankle and couldn't possibly go anywhere.

The reformers decided it was time for a change and aided and abetted by Nasser's people overthrew Badr in September, 1962. A man by the name of Abdullah Salal took over.

The first problem was what should the United States do. This was not an orderly change of power. Should we recognize the new regime or should we not? We did a lot of stewing around on that one. The British were very much against recognition because they had their interests in Aden, just to the south of Yemen, and they were afraid the radicals in North Yemen would hurt the Aden protectorate. They urged us not to recognize. But other Arab governments began to recognize Yemen and we decided that we could too because the usual definitions for recognition seemed to apply. One is that the government must be in

control of the country, and we felt that this was true. I forget the other requirements but we felt that by stretching this a little bit the new Yemeni regime was eligible for recognition. So we made a public statement saying that we now recognized the Yemen Arab Republic.

Q: Just to get a little feel for this, was this debate carried out within the State Department with EUR representatives?

SEELYE: I think we cleared cables with EUR, but I don't remember EUR really being very interested in this. I don't think EUR felt necessarily that it needed to defend British interests in this, as I recall.

Then, of course, the Egyptians decided to insure Salal's survival and introduced some troops. Well, this set the Saudis off. We found ourselves in the middle as the Saudis began to arm the tribes who opposed the new central government. Nasser was quite upset at the Saudis and so he sent in more and more troops. In those days we were trying to develop a relationship with Nasser. President Kennedy evidently was fascinated with Nasser and felt that he was a reformist and that he provided a new look in the Arab world. Accordingly, the U.S. should try to develop a relationship. So we had an AID program in Egypt which helped our links with Nasser even though he was trying to unseat, undermine regimes that were friendly with us like Saudi Arabia, etc. We wanted to maintain that link. At the same time we didn't want the Yemen war to cause internal turmoil in Saudi Arabia. We knew that Saudi Arabia's military was very weak and practically non-existent. Discontent in Saudi Arabia started while Saud was still in power and we wondered how this would erode the Saud regime. There were reverberations within the Saudi political establishment. First one Saudi prince, Prince Talal defected to Cairo. This was quite extraordinary, a member of the Saud family defecting. Secondly, two Saudi pilots defected with their fighter aircraft to Cairo. Third, the police in the western province discovered a parachute drop of weapons. No one picked them up but these events were indications that something was brewing. So everybody was worried, particularly Uncle Sam.

So we decided that we had to devise some way to keep the two sides apart. I think this tended to accelerate the royal family's decision to bring in Faisal. I can't remember the timing on this. Ellsworth Bunker was selected by the White House to go over and see if he couldn't work out a deal whereby each side would decide to lay off and maybe we could neutralize the situation. NEA was asked to assign someone to the Bunker mission. Bob Strong, who was our Director, came to me early one afternoon and said, “Tonight we would like you to come to dinner at Jim Grant's house. I am going and we would like you to come.” Jim was one of the deputy assistant secretaries. We get into Strong's car along with Grant and who should appear but Ellsworth Bunker. I didn't know him but had heard about him. We all drove out to Jim Grant's house out in Virginia some place. We were served dinner by Jim's wife and I remember thinking that this was somewhat strange. Here are four men and the wife serves dinner without eating with us. Bunker was delightful and had wonderful stories to tell, but didn't discuss anything special. Later Bob said to me, “You have been selected to accompany Ellsworth Bunker on this mission.” What I deduced was that they had apparently proposed me to Bunker; Bunker didn't know me, so this was their way of exposing me to Bunker. A funny way of doing it, not telling me what was up.

So we headed out not to Yemen, but first to Saudi Arabia to meet with Faisal to try to persuade him to cease and desist in sending arms and money aids to the Yemeni tribes. Then we went to Cairo. I attended the meeting with Faisal, but did not attend the meeting in Cairo with Nasser. I found it very difficult to be of help when I was not attending meetings, but the Ambassador attended them and would take notes. We tried to get Nasser to ease off and we indicated to him that we were trying to get the Saudis to do the same, etc.

To make a long story short, it so happened that we had to go back three times because the first two times were inconclusive. I remember the first time my suitcase had been lost in Frankfurt and it was finally returned the day I was supposed to go back. I took it home and dumped out the dirty clothes, my wife put in clean clothes and off I went with

Bunker again. Not each time to Cairo, but three times to Saudi Arabia. After the second trip Bob Strong called me in and said that I was needed in the Department and they would send somebody else in my place. I said that would be fine with me. So they told Ambassador Bunker they were pulling Seelye off the mission and would find somebody else to accompany him. I was told later Bunker said, “I am not going without Seelye.” Well, that's the beginning of the cooling of my relationship with Bob Strong. He and I had had a good relationship up to that point. I sensed that Bob Strong thought somehow I had so ingratiated myself with Ellsworth Bunker that I was being disloyal, or something to him. I don't know.

Q: Was this an issue between Strong and Bunker, or purely bureaucratic?

SEELYE: I think purely bureaucratic. Maybe they didn't think I had done a good job, they didn't tell me that. Maybe they decided to let somebody else get some experience. I don't know what the reason was.

Anyway, Rodger Davies called me in and said I was going after all. So, Bob Strong was piqued after that particularly since he had decided that I wouldn't go and then he was forced to face the fact that I would be going. Bob Strong is a very enigmatic person anyway.

Well, finally Bunker was able to work out an agreement. I don't remember the exact details now but the Egyptians were to withdraw some of their forces while the Saudis would decrease their aid. And then a UN force was to be brought in to be a peacekeeping force. I remember we saw U Thant up in the UN and talked to him.

Q: He was the Secretary General of the United Nations.

SEELYE: We knew it was going to be kind of a dicey affair because some of the wording in the agreement was very ambiguous. So that was the Bunker mission. It took quite a while, however, for the UN to assemble itself. If they had moved quickly, Bunker and I felt

that we might have been able to hold the thing together. But the UN took several months to get out there and by that time the tribes got itchy and Nasser changed his mind. So the thing kind of unwound. A study has been done on this by the Institute of Diplomacy at Georgetown. While I was out in Damascus I gave them my views.

Q: Going back to the mission itself, how did Ellsworth Bunker...he was used on the Guinea negotiations, the Panama Canal and then eventually ended up for a long time in Vietnam and was considered probably the premier American negotiator. From your point of view, how did he operate in this context?

SEELYE: Well, his main strength was style. He had a terrific style about him. And, two, he exuded integrity. There was an aristocratic and dignified demeanor. He had a wonderful way of dealing with people and with leading them to believe rightly that he was a man of integrity and that when he said something he meant it. But what surprised me was that as we flew over on the aircraft he wouldn't be preparing for his meetings. If I had been the negotiator I would have been studying and working over what I was going to say and taking notes and working hard. I thought it wasn't for me to propose to him what he should do, so we would sit there in the aircraft and talk. He would tell me delightful stories about this and that. Then I would put together some talking points and after we met with the ambassador, we would get together on what he might say. Then he would go in. What surprised me was the minimum time he spent in preparation. Maybe that wasn't important because there wasn't that much to say, I guess. His task essentially was to persuade two adversaries through the force of his personality to agree. So I would say his great strength was style. Obviously he had more than that because he was so successful in all of his negotiating efforts. Maybe the difference here was that he didn't have to go into that much detail. I don't know.

Q: Were you with him in any of the meetings?

SEELYE: Yes, I was in most of the meetings. All but one meeting with Faisal and we went back three times. I can't remember why I was excluded from that one meeting. We had two meetings with Nasser, from which I was excluded. I don't know why. Perhaps because I was the Arabian Peninsula desk officer and not in charge of Egyptian affairs.

Q: How did Faisal respond to Bunker and to the issue?

SEELYE: Faisal was not very responsive at first. He felt that Nasser had caused Saudi Arabia terrible problems. So he was in no mood to compromise. It took a lot of going back and persuasion. Omar Saqqaf helped a lot. We persuaded Omar in separate meetings the importance of an agreement. I think Omar was more influential in getting Faisal to finally agree than anybody else. He was a crucial element in the situation.

But the King was always courteous and pleasant. He never would say out right “no,” of course. I think he was skeptical at first, and rightly so, about the whole agreement. And there was no reconciliation between him and Nasser at that point, that came several years later.

One thing that we did at that point was to provide reassurances to the Saudis. We felt that in trying to press them to reduce their aid to the tribes we also ought to—at a time that Nasser was so popular in the Arab world and out to overthrow these conservative regimes—tell the King of our commitment to the Kingdom. So we undertook something called “Hard Surface” which was the name for a mission of the flying U.S. aircraft on patrols south to within x number of miles of the Yemeni-Saudi border. We announced that mission by saying, “This is an earnest U.S. support for the Kingdom.” These Hard Surface aircraft were both a symbolic gesture to reassure the Saudis of our support and as a signal to Nasser not to go too far. We were trying to get both parties to disengage and this was a carrot to Faisal. I think we kept this up for several months.

Q: Nasser was a burr under everybody's saddle in those days. How were we feeling at that particular time...reaction with dealing with Nasser?

SEELYE: Well, we had this ongoing relationship with Nasser which I mentioned earlier. Nasser was always very pleasant in meetings with U.S. officials. He had a turn of personality that made him very easy to talk to I am told. He exuded charm. I don't recall that he was anymore responsive to our mediation in the beginning than Faisal. I think some people at the time, including the Saudis, felt that our effort did more for Nasser than it did for Faisal because people felt we were helping Nasser out of a bind. So Nasser, if anything, was probably eventually a little more responsive to what we were proposing because we were getting the Saudis off his back in Yemen.

Q: It was the usual thing. You put troops into one of these tribal things and you never win as we continue to learn.

SEELYE: That's right. I think the Saudis never were too happy with our mediation. They went along because we pressed them to and they knew they needed us. But they felt in the backs of their minds that we were really helping Nasser out of a bind. And I know that a lot of private Americans, oil people and all, were quite upset at our policy because they thought we were really being pro-Nasser. In fact, we were also helping the Saudis out of a bind insofar as their Yemeni involvement was unpopular at home. Bob Comer was the guy at the White House who was one of the prime movers of this policy of trying to separate the two parties. And at one point I was told, I don't know if this was true, President Kennedy took a great personal interest in this. Comer told someone once that Kennedy had spent 100 hours on this operation. I find this hard to believe.

Q: How did this whole thing end up?

SEELYE: It ended up temporarily failing partly, I thought, because the UN got there too late to implement it. It was in any case hard to operate in that environment. I think the

Saudis may have eased off their assistance, but then started it back up. Nasser decided that he couldn't pull out many troops, maybe he didn't pull out any troops. Differences were not resolved until later. In 1965 while I was in Saudi Arabia as Charg# in June, Nasser sent a message to Faisal—they were at odds at that point—saying, “Look, let's see if we can't patch things up. I am on my yacht up in the Red Sea. I am prepared to sail down to Jeddah and let's meet.” And Faisal, being a man of courtesy, said, “Well, I don't think we have anything to discuss, but I will receive you.” I remember the Saudis in the foreign ministry telling me that they were just receiving Nasser out of courtesy, but the differences were so acute that there was no possibility of a reconciliation.

So Nasser arrived and got off the boat. As Charg# I was at the lower end of the ambassadors lined up to meet him. I remember Nasser walked down the line and was perspiring heavily. It was June, but it was late afternoon and it wasn't that humid... Anyway, he met with the King for two or three days and they signed some kind of an agreement to patch things up. I went to the foreign office afterwards and asked, “Well, what happened? You said the differences were irreconcilable.” “Well, Nasser changed and we decided that we could work things out.” So that ameliorated the situation, but as I recall differences broke out again and it wasn't until a year or two later that they finally decided to kiss and make up. My memory is vague on this. But I do remember this incident in 1965, which was a temporary ameliorative. I don't think it was a permanent one, that came later.

Q: Was there anything else through 1965?

SEELYE: The British at that time were trying to create independent entities both in south Yemen and in the Gulf which could survive them. The British saw the handwriting on the wall. I am trying to remember the date the British pulled out of the Gulf. But in any case in Yemen they created a South Arabian Federation, which was an amalgam of the various tribal leaders and of the Aden people. The British remained as the tutors. I remember attending one of their sessions when I was out there in 1961 and the British were guiding the ministers. And we were following the situation closely. In Aden there was a reformist

movement headed by a young nationalist leader by the name of Abdullah Asnag who was a relative moderate. The British thought he was a consummate radical and wouldn't have anything to do with him. They had created this South Arabian Federation which they thought would be the wave of the future. The trouble was that the South Arabian Federation was composed of tribal leaders of the old school and the world was changing, the Middle East was changing. Nationalists everywhere were taking over.

I and Harry Symmes, who was deputy office director, felt that we should urge the British to take another look at Asnag and consider dealing with him. He was not a communist, he was really a reformist-nationalist. The British said, “No, he is a radical.” So we had some real differences with the British on this. They thought that we were trying to undercut them because of what Harry and I were doing. Of course the British embassy always has somebody who comes in and talks to us about Middle East affairs and the Foreign Office were talking to our embassy people.

We thought that we were being honest and helpful to the British on this, but they apparently didn't think so. At one point...Hermann Eilts, who was then our Middle East man at the London embassy, sent a message back to NEA saying, “The British are upset at Seelye and Symmes because they keep arguing vigorously that the Foreign Office should pay more attention to this leader.” Well, as things turned out the British turned their shoulder on him and I think threw him in jail. Ultimately a more radical movement evolved in Yemen that was Marxist. To make a long story short, the Marxists took over and the South Arabian Federation was cast by the wayside.

Q: A long lasting, very nasty regime.

SEELYE: Asnag eventually fled to North Yemen and turned out to be a very reasonable guy. Had the British paid attention to us, I think things would have developed quite differently in Aden.

Q: Looking at this do you think there was something almost endemic within the British Near Eastern experts, the Arabists...they really loved the desert and the tribal chiefs. I noticed this in my short experience in Saudi Arabia. They certainly got into the tribal psyche. Our Arabists didn't get into the desert Arab and the tribal chieftain thing. Could you talk a little about this from your observation at that time?

SEELYE: Well, one thing that did work out, I have to give the British credit, was the bringing together of the Persian Gulf Sheikdoms which eventually became the United Arab Emirates. Conceivably the same thing could have happened there. However one difference, I think, was that the tribal sheikdoms found oil, some of them at least, and fortunately in some cases had enlightened leaders and began to use the oil revenues wisely. Kuwait was the most dramatic example. Bahrain didn't have that much oil but the British wisely developed a very sensible way of using the revenues there and the ruling family was enlightened. When, for example, in Abu Dhabi which had tremendous oil potential, the ruler there, Sheik Shakhbut, refused to move with the times.

Q: He was a real miser, kept his money under his bed.

SEELYE: ...the British moved him aside and brought in Zayid, who was willing to modernize. So I think the fact that oil revenues enabled the Persian Gulf Sheikdoms to have the wherewithal, plus enlightened leadership, prevented the same thing from happening in the Gulf that happened in Aden. The British effort to bring together the tribal sheikhs in an entity succeeded.

Well, you asked about the relationship of Foreign Service Officers to the tribal business. I don't think anybody ever fell in love with tribes.

You say you haven't read the Kaplan book, well, don't read it. It is inaccurate.

Q: We are talking about a book, the Kaplan book, "The Arabists," which has a picture of you on the cover. From all accounts you have read it but I am trying to get it out of the library. It apparently is attacking the Arabist influence of our officers.

SEELYE: Kaplan claims that we were out of touch with reality and that we were romanticists, too much in love with the desert Arabs. I have had two exchanges with the author about this. In any case I don't think that FSO's had any love affair with the tribes.

Q: I never felt that, but I felt the British...

SEELYE: They had their famous romantic figures in the 19th century, of course. But I am not sure all British foreign Service people felt that way. The new generation came along and was attuned to reality. I think the Arabists who became the key players in the British foreign service by the time the sixties came along had a realistic outlook. Of course, those who created the South Arabian Federation were of the old school. The British Arab experts that I dealt with in the sixties and seventies were very much realists and very able people. For a while in the British foreign service they took the brightest diplomats and put them into Arabic studies. That explained why so many of the British diplomats who moved up to the top echelons and became permanent under secretaries were Arabists. I don't think they do that anymore. So the British had top people assigned to the area in my time and they were bright enough to know not to be taken in by old fashioned views.

Q: Were you still the desk officer for the Arabian Peninsula when the Marxist regime came into Aden, or was that later?

SEELYE: It came later. When I was in Saudi Arabia at one point we were discussing what we should do in terms of approaching the British again on what was going on in Aden. I remember this because Hermann Eilts was Ambassador and he asked me to meet with him, the station chief and others, because things were unraveling.

Q: There was a real nasty little war, kind of like Cyprus.

SEELYE: I felt that the British were wrong in what they were doing because the radicals were gaining strength. The station chief took the British position.

Q: You were on the desk when President Kennedy was assassinated. How did this impact on your area?

SEELYE: Well, it impacted, of course, very much as it did everywhere. People were just shocked, and disheartened and we had long lines at the embassy in Jeddah waiting to sign the book, and in Kuwait, etc. I personally had had maybe three encounters with the President which made me personally quite upset. The first encounter was the meeting with King Saud when he was in the rocking chair. Then later at dinner I talked with him. He was so human in both cases and so interested in what I had to say. And the way he treated me when I was taking notes, instead of being peremptory, he just sort of whispered in a very nice way. Then I remember once being out at Andrews Air Force Base when he was returning from somewhere. I don't know why I was there, it must have had something to do with the Middle East. I was in line with maybe ten people, at the tail end and I had my gloves on, it was winter. He came all the way down the line and I had to take off my gloves to shake hands with him. That was a very nice personal touch.

His death was a shock in the Middle East. It had no impact on policy, although certainly Lyndon Johnson never had the interest in the Middle East that Kennedy had. Let us remember that when Kennedy was a Senator in 1958 he spoke out in favor of Algerian independence. I think that this kind of sympathy carried on when he reached the White House. This was reflected in his spending one hundred hours on the Yemen/Saudi/ Egyptian situation, if indeed he did.

Q: What was our view of the Soviet Union during this 1961-64 period? Or was it even a play?

SEELYE: During the fifties there was very much a cold war context to Middle East policy. We had the Baghdad Pact which fell apart. It was kind of a precursor of the Kissinger years and the cold war projected to the Middle East. Looking at the sixties, I don't remember sensing a cold war context to our Middle East policy. Our policy focused more on indigenous problems. I think at that time we realistically realized that the Soviets were not the prime movers of the problems out there. Nasser had his own reasons for undermining the Arab conservative regimes. Even though he had good relations with the Soviets, I don't think we sensed that the Soviets were pushing him in this direction although they welcomed it. With regard to the revolt in Yemen, I didn't sense any Soviet involvement. So it is interesting that you asked because I don't think in the sixties that the Soviet factor loomed so large in U.S. policy.

Q: I think it is indicative that you were dealing with these things. That you were not sitting around with red arrows pointing towards the Persian Gulf, or something like that, at that time. What about the role of the Israeli lobby and our policy? Did it have much of an impact in the area you were in charge of?

SEELYE: I was, of course, in Arabian Peninsula Affairs and that was sort of out of that orbit. Obviously the Israelis were not well-disposed towards Saudi Arabia, but I didn't sense in terms of our relations with Saudi Arabia or Yemen or Kuwait that that was a major factor. In any case, the lobby was not as strong in those days, it became strong later. Even during my short tenure on the Jordan-Iraq desk, it wasn't something that I was aware of. So in the 1960's I didn't sense that the lobby had an impact on Arabian Peninsula Affairs.

Let's go back, however, to 1954—this is an interesting anecdote as a footnote to history and I don't think I mentioned it before in my earlier comments. At that time Jordan and Israeli affairs were combined in one desk. In 1952, when I went to Jordan, the desk officer was a gentleman who had just come out of Haifa, where he had been consul. He was at the desk throughout the two years I was in Jordan. And then in 1955 or late 1954, he was summarily dismissed from the Foreign Service. Why? Because he was caught passing

a confidential document to an official at the Israeli embassy. I mention that because that never happened after that. We know that plenty of classified documents were passed with impunity to the Israelis, not necessarily by Foreign Service officers, but by Defense Department officers and others. So it became a common thing. But in the 1950's the action was considered so shocking and the lobby was so weak that this guy was fired. Had that happened ten or fifteen years later, he would still be a Foreign Service officer, I'm sure.

Q: Obviously oil was on our main agenda there. How did we view the oil situation during this time? You had Kuwait and Saudi Arabia which took care of a significant bit of the oil in the world.

SEELYE: At that point, of course, oil was very inexpensive, very cheap. It was about $1.50 a barrel. I remember when I was in Kuwait there was talk about the oil producers getting together, and at that point they called it pro-rationing, before OPEC was created.

Well, I don't think that oil was a big political issue at that point because the oil producers were just beginning to talk about working together. There was no sense that they were going to force the prices up and form a cartel, which eventually happened. So I don't recall that we sensed that that was a potential problem. Oil was flowing at a reasonable price and we were happy with it. There was no pressure on the oil companies to change the terms of the oil agreements. I remember when the oil was just beginning to be developed in Dubai, about 1963 maybe, and Continental was going out to look for oil. One of the sheiks of Dubai was here and we entertained him and Continental officials. Everything seemed to be working fine in terms of the availability of oil and the relationship of the oil companies with the host governments.

Q: Then you left the desk in 1964 and went to the War College. You were there from 1964-65. What was the interest at the War College? Did they draw on you much for the Middle East or not?

SEELYE: No, they didn't. I don't recall anybody particularly focusing in on that. In those days you had an IRP to write, a research paper, and I did mine on the instruments of diplomacy used in negotiating and mediating three disputes. I used Yemen as one example, based on my own experience; and Cyprus and Kashmir. But the Yemen component was my only Middle East focus at the War College.

Q: Well, then you went to Jeddah from 1965-68 where you served as deputy chief of mission. How did that come about?

SEELYE: I don't know how that came about. I remember Harry Symmes, then Director of NE, calling me and saying, “We have in mind sending you to Jeddah as DCM.” I said, “Fine.” At that point Parker Hart had just completed his tour as ambassador and Nick Thacher was completing his tour as deputy chief of mission. So as it so often happens the two top people at the embassy leave at the same time. But Nick stayed until I got there. Bill Porter was appointed as the successor to Parker Hart. In retrospect it surprises me that I didn't meet with Bill Porter before my assignment. They must have said they had in mind sending Seelye and here is what he is like or something, and he said, “Fine.” Because normally, as you know, the ambassador has an important say in who his DCM is. However, he never arrived because shortly after I arrived in Jeddah in June, our Ambassador then in Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge, decided he wanted a senior and experienced Foreign Service officer to help him out. He realized that if he wanted a man of that stature he couldn't be just DCM so he created for the first time in U.S. diplomatic history a deputy ambassador position with the rank of ambassador. So Ambassador Porter, who had been Ambassador elsewhere, was called off the assignment to Jeddah and went off to Vietnam. And that is why I was Charg# d'affaires for six months because then they had to drum up a new ambassador, Hermann Eilts. Nick Thacher and I overlapped about a week and then he left and I was Charg# from June until Eilts arrived.

Q: What was the situation in Saudi Arabia during this period?

SEELYE: It was a very interesting time because while I was Charg# the Yemen thing was again acting up; I mentioned that Nasser came to call and there was a temporary improvement in the Egyptian-Saudi relationship. I remember having to go to see King Faisal—the King always went to Ta'if over the summer, it is north of Jeddah up in the mountains and is cooler. I flew up there to make a demarche on him, presumably concerning Yemen. The fact that he would see a Charg# was a measure of the U.S.-Saudi relationship because normally a Charg# never gets to see a chief of state.

So we were still back and forth on Yemen. But the most dramatic thing that happened during my tenure there of six months as Charg# was the beginning of Saudi-U.S. military sales. Of course we had had a military training mission in Saudi Arabia for a long time, but it was in 1965 when Saudi Arabia first purchased arms from the United States. The Saudis decided that they wanted a defense umbrella composed of fighter aircraft and surface-to-air missiles. The Saudis specifically asked for Lockheed F-104s as their fighter aircraft and Hawk surface-to-air missiles made by Raytheon. The experts in Washington felt that the Hawk missiles were entirely appropriate for Saudi Arabia. They were the latest state of the art but not so complicated that we might not be able to train the Saudis to handle them. But the F-104s were considered to be inappropriate for the Saudis. They were a complex aircraft. They were crashing all over Europe.

Q: There was a terrible problem. They were called the StarFighters and the Germans called them the widow makers.

SEELYE: That's right. So we were trying to discourage the Saudis from purchasing them. I was a bystander at that point, sitting in Jeddah. Then I got a message saying, “We have got to try to persuade the Saudis to buy F-5s instead of the F-104s, so we are sending out a team of Air Force officers headed by Chuck Yeager [a hotshot test pilot] to meet with the Saudi air force people and to try to persuade them to buy the F-5s.” So he comes out, a charming guy. He meets with the Saudis and succeeds in persuading every air force officer there, except the chief of the air force, Colonel Hashim, that the F-5 should

be obtained. Hashim dug in his heels. It had to be the F-104. Well, we couldn't figure out why. Yeager and I would get together and try to figure out why. It turned out later that the reason Hashim was holding out was because Lockheed had paid him $100,000. It never occurred to me at the time that there might be a payoff involved. Later, of course, Northrop made payoffs too. They all gave payoffs. The British more so.

Anyway, we reported the Saudis refusal to purchase the F-5s back to Washington. By that time all the Saudi ministries had moved to Riyadh, with the exception of the foreign ministry which was still in Jeddah. The Saudis didn't want the embassies up in Riyadh quite yet because they didn't think Riyadh was quite ready for such a foreign invasion. They were going to wait until they had built a ghetto, a kind of big park where all the embassies would be isolated. So at that point if you wanted to deal with anyone outside the foreign ministry you had to go up to Riyadh. Finally, after much stewing around, Washington sent me a cable saying, “Okay, you are authorized to go up to Riyadh, to the ministry of defense, and tell the minister that the United States would after all sell them F-104s since the Saudis insisted.. I went to Riyadh to present the package to Prince Sultan, and returned to Jeddah.

The following day I received a cable saying, “Hold everything. We have an alternative package to present to the Saudis. This will include the Hawk missiles but it will now include British aircraft, Lightnings. You are therefore instructed, and a separate message has gone to the British Ambassador, Morgan Mann, to jointly visit Sultan and put before him this alternative package.” I went back with the message, “Well, which one should I favor?” The answer was, “You are supposed to give equal weight to both packages.”

So a couple of days later I went to Riyadh again, this time with Morgan Mann. With Morgan Mann was a representative of the British Aircraft Corporation. I thought it was very strange for him to be taking somebody representing the aircraft manufacturer. I think this guy went into the meeting with us. Extraordinary. So we went in to see Prince Sultan and Mann did most of the talking because it was a new package involving the British. I

indicated to Sultan that we supported this package with equal weight as the package I had presented to him a few days earlier. Sultan looked at me kind of puzzled and asked, “If we should choose this package, which is half British and half American, what does this do to the U.S. military umbrella?” Well, as far as I knew, we didn't have any explicit commitment on this score. Ever since the Hard Surface operation there had been an assumption that we would come to Saudi Arabia's aid militarily if needed, but nothing in writing. Without instructions I replied, “This would not affect our military umbrella.”

As we were leaving the meeting, Sultan called me back into his office and asked, “What goes on here?” I said, “All I can tell you is that I have been instructed to inform you that we give equal weight to both packages.”

On the plane returning to Jeddah the British Ambassador and I drafted a brief communiqu# to be read over the Saudi radio that evening about the joint US-UK package that had just been presented to King Faisal. I don't think we ever made an announcement about our package but Mann wanted to make an announcement about the joint package. He said, “Do you mind if we put the word UK before US in the announcement?” I said, “Morgan, I couldn't care less. Do it any way you want to do it.” The announcement was handed over to the Jeddah radio station to be broadcast in both English and Arabic. It just so happened by coincidence that the announcer for the English language news was an American who had been an English language teacher in Jeddah and had taken on this job. And the news came on about 6:00 p.m. I wasn't paying any attention to it, I didn't listen to it. Apparently it referred to the “US-UK” package.

Suddenly about 7:00 I got a heated call from Morgan Mann saying, “What are you doing? You have gotten your man to put “US” before “UK” in the announcement.” I said, “Morgan, you must be kidding. I told you I didn't care which came first.” He said, “You have done it purposely and betrayed me.” I said, “Listen, Morgan. I have done nothing of the sort.” He hung up on me in high dudgeon. So I called our PAO, George Thompson, and asked him to go to the station and find out what happened. George hightailed it down there and

then called me and said, “The American announcer read exactly as it was handed to him.” I asked, “Who prepared the thing?” “I don't know, some Palestinian, I think,” came the response. So I called Morgan and said, “Morgan, this is what happened. You can believe it or not. The American announcer, who is not my man but an independent operator, was handed a piece of paper that had “US” before “UK.” He did not initiate the change. Just a silly little vignette.

Later on I discovered that the reason for proposing the second package was that McNamara, who was then Secretary of Defense, was trying to sell to the British an experimental aircraft that was no longer experimental. It was not in production. This was the F-111, which was a swing-wing aircraft and which was flown off aircraft carriers as well as off ground airfields. The British were not inclined to buy it and McNamara needed more buyers to justify the F-111 assembly line. So McNamara proposed to the British that if they would buy the F-111's, we would help them sell their aircraft to Saudi Arabia. The trouble was that this happened after we had told the Saudis that we were going to sell them our all-American package.

Well, the British aircraft representative helped the British sale by paying off Sultan. The Saudis decided to buy the Lightnings, which turned out to be an highly ineffective aircraft. In fact, they were never used. Much, much later the Saudis bought some F-5s. So that's the story of the first Saudi-US arms deal.

Q: Okay, we are going to call this off here. What we really have is your time as DCM, as Charg#, and then we will talk about things after you ended up in Jeddah when Hermann Eilts came on board.

SEELYE: Okay.

Q: Today is December 13, 1993. In our last interview we were talking about you being Charg# in Jeddah and the problem about military sales to the Saudis. Why don't we pick it up from there?

SEELYE: Okay. The other important issue that I recall during my tenure as Charg# was the fact there were still tensions in Yemen. I think I mentioned that Nasser at one point tried to patch up differences with Faisal. That worked for a while but then it fell apart. I remember having to go and see King Faisal in Ta'if, the summer residence for the palace, on some crucial issue dealing with Yemen. Omar Saqqaf, the Foreign Minister, had a peculiar habit. He would get to the Foreign Ministry rather late in the morning and then I would suddenly get a call from him, say about 11:00, and he would say, “Come to my office, I want to see you immediately.” Well, it took about fifteen minutes to get from the embassy compound to the foreign office. So I will say the Saudis did deal at high levels with an American Charg# because of our good relationship with them. I didn't find that not being the Ambassador was a disadvantage at the time in dealing with the Saudis.

This is an interesting side affair which isn't political, but we had a problem at the embassy there. Back in the late sixties they were starting a DCM course at the FSI. They wanted case studies of problems that DCMs faced so that they could be played out in the course. I gave them one from my Jeddah experience which concerned the wife of the chief of station, who was a great pain-in-the-neck. She was of Lebanese origin and she had some close female friends who were Lebanese married to leading Saudi merchants. She started spreading the word that I was junior to her husband. She happened to be a very strong Christian Maronite. The Maronites have long dominated Lebanon and have not always been in sync with the best interests of the Lebanese body politic. The United States has often been upset with some of their shenanigans. She alleged that I was somehow anti-Maronite and was to be viewed with suspicion. And not only that, she began to attack “the embassy” as a whole. Well, as you know CIA station chiefs tend to have cover ranks that

are lower than their positions in the Agency. Anyway she was spreading gossip that was harmful and embarrassing for the embassy. She was undercutting the embassy.

Q: How were you getting this information?

SEELYE: My wife was picking it up mainly. I deliberated as to what to do. This was near the end of my tenure as Charg# and Hermann Eilts was coming in as Ambassador. So I decided to hold off doing anything until he arrived. My wife had a particularly hard time with her. I felt that what she was doing was turning certain Saudis against me. Furthermore, not only that, but it turned out she was running a kind of high-class brothel. There were a couple of diplomats there, and I won't identify their nationalities, one was an ambassador, who had the “hots” for the wives of some other diplomats and she would facilitate their little trysts in her home. She would let them go there where they would not be seen. That did not exactly go down well for the reputation of the American embassy.

Q: But this also became known?

SEELYE: Of course it got out. So the Ambassador arrived and after he had been there for a while I said, “Hermann, this is the situation and my recommendation is that we request that the station chief be transferred so that we can get his wife out of here.” Well, understandably, I guess, Hermann said, “Well, look, I am new here, I haven't experienced this, so really I should have to experience it myself, feel it, know about it first hand before taking any action.” Once Hermann got there, of course, the wife of the station chief didn't attack him and no word was spread in the community that Hermann Eilts was anti-Maronite or anything like that. He didn't pick up any of the stories about the brothel, so the net result was that they hung on. And while the station chief was okay and a good officer, his wife continued to act up and caused my wife a lot of problems.

Q: Had you at any point been able to talk to the station chief about the situation?

SEELYE: Well, I thought that should be done by the Ambassador, frankly. But he didn't feel he wanted to, so nobody talked to the station chief. I probably made a mistake not talking to him before that. But I guess I felt that if I had spoken to him it might have caused friction and difficulty and with the Ambassador coming, maybe that would be hard on him, etc. For one reason or another I didn't talk to him.

Q: Hermann Eilts arrives. He had been in charge of Saudi affairs in Washington in the late fifties.

SEELYE: He took over Saudi affairs in 1958-61 and I took over from him.

Q: When he appeared on the scene did he have an agenda that was coming from Washington or did he just arrive and take it as it came?

SEELYE: I don't think that he had an agenda. He didn't come from being in charge of Saudi affairs, he had been in London as our Middle East man before that. So I don't know that he had any special program except to do what an ambassador does to promote relations and carry on.

Q: How did he use you?

SEELYE: He was terrific. We got along beautifully. I always liked and admired him tremendously. Hermann, of course, was a man of tremendous abilities. He had a very fertile mind and when he would walk into the office in the morning he already had ideas. Immediately he would call his secretary and start dictating. After dictating a couple of cables to his secretary he would call in my secretary and dictate to her, which didn't bother me at all. He just wanted to get all these things out. That was his pattern in the morning. He would be thinking over night. He was always very good with me and would show me his drafts.

I think he wanted me to run the embassy in terms of the administration and that sort of thing, manage it. I think we teamed up pretty well.

We had some slightly different approaches to the dynamics of the Middle East. Hermann was a very conservative person. He was a little more sympathetic to the British position in Aden, which I think I discussed last time, and he was less convinced than I was that the British should have cultivated this nationalist who opposed the British, but who was a moderate nationalist. Hermann was obsessed about Nasser, for example. Some of us had felt that while Nasser was a force for a lot of evil in trying to overthrow friendly regimes, nevertheless, given the social dynamics of the Middle East before he came along, he was a reformer, he was a nationalist, so we saw some good sides to him. Thus we had these slight differences of emphasis, but nothing of great importance.

The most dramatic thing that happened during our joint tenure there was the 1967 war.

Q: Known as the Six Day War, June, 1967.

SEELYE: The way it manifest itself at our embassy was one night at about 9:00 p.m. there was a big explosion. We lived in a compound so we all rushed to the chancery and discovered that somebody had set off a bomb and blown up our generator. But nobody was injured.

Q: This was during the war?

SEELYE: Just as the war started. That caused concern in the official American community and we pointed out that we thought this was an isolated incident. The Foreign Ministry assigned some national guard troops to protect the embassy. The Saudis investigated the matter but I can't remember if they found the culprits or not. In any case, neither Hermann nor I felt that what happened in the war would lead to disturbances of any significance in Saudi Arabia. While embassies around the area were evacuating personnel, we resisted

evacuation. Fortunately we were able to persuade Washington that we should keep our people there in as much as they were not in danger despite this one incident.

Now, unfortunately, the Department has not always been as responsive. I was in Syria later when there was panic in the Department because of a series of tragedies in the Middle East affecting some embassies. As a result the Department issued sweeping instructions that all embassies should clear out all personnel without distinction. Fortunately in this case the Department accepted our judgment that we should keep our people there but other posts equally secure did not fare so well.

Q: How did we view the Saudis reaction to the 1967 war? Nasser more or less provoked the war insisting that the UN pull its troops out. But it was right on the Saudi border that some of the action was happening.

SEELYE: You could argue that the Israelis chose to be provoked by what Nasser did, but there is also the argument that the Israelis had to react the way they did. It is not clear whether Nasser intended to go to war.

One didn't sense that the Saudis felt that they were close to any conflagration or close to a crisis. Riyadh was a long way away from the battlefield. Obviously there was sympathy among the Saudis for Nasser's action because of the fact that there was anti-Israeli sentiment in Saudi Arabia. The government shared the anti-Israeli sentiment but had a strong antagonism toward Nasser. We didn't face the situation where the government issued an ultimatum saying, “Look, you have to support Nasser on this and condemn Israel for that.” As I recall, the Saudis did not make a big issue of that because they already had their problems with Nasser. I know that the local employees in our embassy were terribly upset. We had one local employee who resigned. He was a Sudanese working for USIA and resigned in the belief that the United States had collaborated with Israel. As you recall a big myth that was spread throughout the area alleged that the U.S.

had helped Israel in its wiping out the Egyptian air force and in defeating Egypt. This was widely believed at the time.

Q: It is still widely believed, I think.

SEELYE: And in some sense in retrospect it may be right because we now understand, although we do not have 100 percent proof, that at the time an American AWAC-type aircraft was sent to Israel and had Israeli markings on it and was put up in the air to help the Israelis identify Egyptian airfields and the location of planes. So, if that is true, and there are people who believe it is true—although people like Dick Helms and others claim it is poppycock—if it is true, then there is some substance to the belief that the U.S. collaborated at least in a limited sense.

I think there was one incident in the eastern province at that time which the Saudis put down quite quickly, but I can't recall what it was.

Q: Back to some of the other things that were mentioned before, you say Ambassador Eilts would come in and dictate cables...its nice for someone to have great thoughts and all but Saudi Arabia wasn't on the absolute front burner of the United States...what happened with them?

SEELYE: I can't really say because I don't know how people in Washington took them. Certainly the desk officers and other people in NEA read them. They gave a flavor of what the Saudis were thinking and planning and that sort of thing. Obviously cables were screened for the Assistant Secretary, how many of them he saw, I don't know. But Saudi-American relations in terms of Middle East-American relations loom fairly large. They would loom larger later on than they did then. Given the perceived threat from Nasser and the Yemen problem, there was a little more focus on Saudi Arabia at that time than there had been, let's say five or ten years before. But how Washington reacted, I don't remember or didn't know. I can't answer that.

Q: What was your impression and Eilts's impression about the effectiveness of the Saudi government?

SEELYE: Its interesting because Faisal had taken over a couple of years before I got there. He came in with a firm hand and a sense of orderliness toward finances. He started to check the erosion in Saudi Arabia that had been reflected at one time in the sixties with the defection of one Saudi prince and a couple of pilots. So Faisal was putting the country back together. Nevertheless by 1966, about three years after he had taken over, we were still not sure to what extent Saudi stability was secure. I recall sitting down with Dick Murphy, a political officer, and brainstorming as to how long we thought this Saudi regime would last. I remember in a very cautious way we projected that it could certainly last five years, but in a ten-year time frame we were less certain. As one looks back it is really quite amusing that we were so cautious because the regime proved to be quite stable and has lasted a long time. That was almost thirty years ago. But this was just after the period of Faisal's taking over and the Yemen disturbances. So we were still not totally confident that the regime could hold on. But obviously it did.

In terms of looking at the regime, I do recall that the Minister of Interior in those days was Fahd, who is now King. He was considered one of the more liberal Saudi princes. In those days he was talking about having a consultative council and opening up the society a bit. It is ironic he was talking that way in the sixties and this only happened last year—in the early 1990s.

Prince Sultan, Minister for Defense, was front and center for us because he was handling military affairs.

I don't think we sensed any real political ferment in Saudi Arabia at that point. People were making money. The princes were being taken care of. Although Faisal was very strong about controlling the princes, not letting them step out of line or giving them too much money. After Faisal died, my understanding is that that got a bit out of control. So Faisal

operated with a very firm hand and he had respect in Saudi Arabia, and I think that was a key factor that enabled Saudi Arabia to move in a positive, stable direction.

Q: After the 1967 war, were there any developments with Nasser or Yemen?

SEELYE: I am trying to remember when it was played out. I think it was about 1968 when Faisal and Nasser finally buried the hatchet once and for all. I left Jeddah in July, 1968 and it may have happened after I left. By that time the Yemeni regime had been in power for six years or so and had become a little more confident of its security and in itself. It was more willing to cut a deal. One aspect of that deal was to allow some of the Yemenis who had opposed the republic but not members of the royal family to return. But there remains a ruling that no member of the Hamid al-Din royal family can return. There is only one exception, and that concerns the Zabbara family in Sanaa. That is a prominent merchant family which had been close to the royal family. The son of the former Yemeni Charg#, a man named Muhammad Zabbara, married a member of the royal family and because he was living in Yemen, teaching there, he was allowed to bring her back. She is the only royal family member allowed to live in Yemen.

Q: How about ARAMCO during the time you were there? ARAMCO always has a very strong political section. How were we viewing it and how did it work, particularly during the problem of the 1967 war and all that?

SEELYE: The Consul General in Dhahran was closer to ARAMCO than we were, but there was an ARAMCO representative in Jeddah. He used to come in regularly, almost every week, and we would compare notes. And, of course, the Consul General was reporting his contacts with ARAMCO. We had pretty close contacts and we used to exchange views when there were crises or problems. I think during the 1967 war the same thing happened. They wanted to know whether they should send their people home and we recommended that they not. The remarkable thing to me has always been that despite the fact that most of the ARAMCO employees in those days were Shiites from the eastern

province, a minority that had been really mistreated by the government, during crises there were practically no incidents. We had good relations with ARAMCO. We used to have tennis matches between ARAMCO and the little Dunes Club in Jeddah—a club started by Ambassador Wadsworth. It had a sand golf course that he built as well as a couple of crummy tennis courts. I was more a tennis buff rather than golfer and got the courts improved. As we built up our tennis facility we had matches with ARAMCO. That was fun and it also created a social relationship between the embassy and ARAMCO.

Q: Did you find that the ARAMCO employees were at times running their foreign policy and we were running ours?

SEELYE: No, I don't think so. You knew ARAMCO better than I since you were in Dhahran, but my sense was that most of the ARAMCO employees were apolitical, technicians and service people, who were somewhat isolated from Saudi Arabian and Middle East politics. They enjoyed the perks, took off on long vacations and had a kind of life of Riley. I didn't have any sense that the majority of ARAMCO people reacted that much to what happened in the Middle East.

Q: I don't want to over emphasize this and I am really thinking about the political affairs people. Did you or Ambassador Eilts ever have the feeling, "Come on fellows, get on board," type of thing?

SEELYE: No, I don't think we felt that. I have a feeling they kind of deferred to the embassy on these things. I didn't sense any heated objections to us or what the United States was doing. I think the ARAMCO people in government affairs all recognized the domestic realities back here that controlled our policy in the Middle East. Our only problem (minor) was that our Consul General in Dhahran kept complaining about the embassy. I would have to go up and hold his hand every now and then. He was always complaining about minutiae, such as about the pouches or something. I thought that his complaints were somewhat amusing.

Q: One last question on your time in Saudi Arabia, there were restrictions on alcohol, on women, it is not the easiest environment. You were in charge of the staff. Can you tell us any of the problems that occurred because of the environment?

SEELYE: Well, to start, we had no liquor problems because we brought in our liquor in bulk in zinc-lined crates. When I arrived I was told that there was an understanding with the Foreign Ministry that it would not ask questions and we would not ask questions. This, I think, applied to all diplomatic missions. So the zinc-lining was to make sure that if the crate dropped on the wharf it wouldn't leak. We were much better off than the Consulate General with regard to our liquor privileges.

Driving for women was a terrible problem. The only three individuals in the embassy who had drivers were the Ambassador, the DCM, and the station chief. Of course that marked him because everybody figured out that he must be the station chief because he had a driver too. But we did arrange bus service into town for the wives. The husbands who didn't have drivers would have to escort their wives into town for shopping and that sort of thing. So it was a big handicap, no question about it.

Q: I might mention that our consul general in Dhahran, this is 1958-60, Walter Schwinn, was able to get Saud Bin Jiluwi, the premier of the eastern province at that time, to grant wives driving licenses because he claimed that otherwise men would have to be doing women's work and it was degrading to them. So my wife had a Saudi driving license.

SEELYE: But just between the consulate general and ARAMCO.

Q: Yes, around the base. She couldn't drive outside the immediate area.

SEELYE: I remember Walter Schwinn. There was the famous incident where Walter came back from Dhahran bringing a locker full of liquor and the customs people wanted to open it and he sat on it and said, “Not on my life will I let you open this.” I remember one of our wives at the embassy, who was an enterprising young woman, once put on an Arab

headdress so that she could drive without anyone knowing she was a woman. A little bit risky, but she got away with it. I think she did that a couple of times.

We had a creek about 20 miles north of Jeddah which is in a bit from the Red Sea where people rented ramshackle shacks, which to us was a great asset because we could go swimming, snorkeling and sailing there.

Q: Were there any great problems that you had with the American community?

SEELYE: Well, we had a bit of a problem with the so-called TWA community. The Saudi Airlines was run by TWA. So TWA got contract employees to go out there and fly and maintain the planes. There was a school that TWA started which the State Department contributed to as part of helping American education abroad. We always had somebody on the board of the school. But there was an almost irreconcilable problem of the people at TWA resenting the embassy people because we had liquor and also the usual feeling that diplomats are snooty and are not real Americans. But we did our best. In fact, I made a great effort to try to overcome that by getting to know them and entertaining them. We played softball with them and that sort of thing, trying to break down this sort of barrier. I remember that one of my people who I had assigned to be on the board would come back wringing his hands after some meetings. We had very close relations with the head of the TWA office, who would come regularly to compare notes and to seek guidance. So relations were certainly not all bad.

Q: Did you have any difficult arrest cases while you were there?

SEELYE: We had one fascinating case. We heard through the grapevine that an American had been arrested down along the southern coast of the Red Sea at a place called Yanbu. At first we couldn't get to the heart of it. We kept going to the Foreign Ministry and asking if it was true. Finally, a foreign minister looked into it and confirmed that there was indeed an American being held down in Yanbu. We said, “Well, for God's sake release him.” So they

finally released him and he came up to Jeddah and we took care of him for a few days and he told us his tale.

He was a single sailor on a sail boat. He was sailing up the Red Sea coast and, of course, at night he anchored offshore. I think in terms of maritime law, you are allowed to anchor in territorial waters without a passport or visa. Well, he had just anchored maybe a hundred yards off shore near a town 200 miles or so south of Jeddah. He saw two or three people waving, and beckoning to him. So he got into his little dingy and paddled ashore. They said, “What are you doing? We have to take you to our police station.” They were very nice to him. The police didn't know what to do with him so they called their headquarters for guidance. They were told to hold him while headquarters checked into the matter. Anyway, to make the story short, the poor guy was kept in Yanbu waiting for instructions from headquarters as to what to do with him. They didn't mistreat him. They fed him well. They offered him young boys, he said, which he refused. For a whole 30 days he was held in reasonably good conditions while the Saudi police waited for instructions. Finally word came down to release him and to bring him to Jeddah. So they brought him to Jeddah by land and towed his boat. They wouldn't let him sail to Jeddah.

Then we had a problem of how to get him out of Saudi Arabia. You cannot get an exit visa unless you have an entry visa. He didn't have an entry visa. I think it took us another ten days before we finally got the Saudi bureaucracy to accept the fact that he could not have had an entry visa because he was not there formally. We finally sprung him loose. I said to him, “I hope you write your story some day.” I wish I had kept his name and address. I have never read his story anywhere, but he must have a fascinating tale to tell.

That's the only arrest case that I recall in Jeddah or Riyadh, although I guess in Dhahran there may have been some cases during my time, but they were handled by the Consulate.

Q: You then came back to Near Eastern Affairs. You never really got yourself out of the Near East. There was never any of this so-called balance type thing.

SEELYE: Well, as you recall, Secretary Kissinger at one point introduced what he called GLOP to get people out of areas that they specialized in. My understanding was that he did this not because of the Middle East hands but more because of the Latin American hands, but it applied to all regions. It just so happened that I went from one Middle East posting to another. I didn't ask for any of these things. In those days you didn't seek assignments the way you do now.

Before I left Jeddah I did have correspondence with the Department about going to Baghdad as Charg#, once relations were restored, because in 1967 relations were broken. Somehow we thought relations would soon be restored. Before my tour was up Washington decided that I would be sent to Baghdad as Charg#. Well, my three years were up and Baghdad hadn't opened up. One proposal was that I should go to Beirut and wait there. Thank God I didn't because I would have been waiting until 1973. Instead the Department decided that it would bring me back and put me in charge of what they called Arabian North Affairs, which covered Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan. I took Bob Houghton's place in August, 1968.

This was at the end of the Johnson Administration. Just after I came into NEA, Ambassador Pete Hart was brought back from Turkey to be Assistant Secretary. This was unfair to him because it was just as administrations were changing, during a phasing out and a phasing in period. Then when the new Administration came in William Rogers was appointed as Secretary of State. He had gotten to know Joe Sisco when the latter had been Assistant Secretary for International Organizations Affairs. Rogers had been a member of the American UN delegation one year and had gotten to know Sisco then. He decided to replace Pete Hart with Sisco as Assistant Secretary of NEA. This was tough on

Hart because he had only been there a few months. Pete Hart became head of FSI for a while and then left the Service.

David Korn alludes to Sisco's takeover of NEA in his book that I reviewed for the Foreign Service Journal on the Israeli-Egyptian war of attrition of 1968-71. The one exception that I took to the book was the allegation that the so-called Arabists in NE (the four office directors) viewed Sisco with considerable apprehension. The four of us were Roy Atherton, Bill Brewer, Dick Parker and myself. Well, I had no particular apprehension about Sisco because I had never dealt with him. I didn't really know him at all. Maybe Dick Parker had some apprehensions, I think he might have had some dealings with him before I got there. Pete Hart was a good man and somebody who knew the area and he was leaving and somebody who didn't know the area was coming in. So there was bound to be some concern. Once Sisco was entrenched, at least two of us felt he was okay.

Sisco, I think, by the same token, was a little apprehensive about the office directors. Could he rely on their loyalty? Were they hopelessly pro-Arab? This sort of thing probably went through his mind. But, as he acknowledges in the Kaplan book, the office directors served him well. Although he did make one reference in the book—and I have taken him up on it—to the effect that Davies, Parker and Seelye couldn't draft on this or that in dealings with Congress. I sent Sisco a faxed copy of his alleged statement to Kaplan saying that what he had meant to say was that the three of us were probably better suited to deal with the Middle East region than with Congress. In any case, some of us got along with Sisco and some of us didn't. I think this has been true anywhere where Sisco has been. He is very dynamic, very forceful, an operator par excellence within a bureaucracy.

I recall in my case, shortly after he got there, that we had a crisis in Lebanon. He called all the office directors in, not just me because he didn't know me. He said, “What do we do? What do we do?” We all talked. I realized that I had to establish myself, obviously, otherwise every time something happened in Lebanon all my colleagues would be pulled into the room with me. I recall going back and thinking about it and preparing a guidance

message to the embassy in Beirut. It was all ready to go out the night before but I thought I would hold it. The next morning, sure enough, Sisco called in all the office directors again. I had about half a dozen copies of the draft cable and said, “Well, Joe, here is what I propose,” and passed out the copies of the cable. He read it and said, “Just right, that is what I like.” So from then on whenever there was something happening in my area of responsibility he would call me in alone. So I had established myself.

But we hit it off fortunately and I had no problems with him. He shouted at a lot of people and ranted, but rarely at me.

Q: Did you feel that he came in with an agenda or was he an operator is an operator—wherever he was was the center of the universe?

SEELYE: I found after he trusted us, and me, particularly, he began to listen and respond positively. And that was good. In fact, when I got to Tunisia several years later, the British Ambassador who was there said to me, “Well, I just saw our file on you. One thing I remember about your file is that they said you were one of the office directors that Sisco listened to.” How the British came up with that I don't know.

One of the advantages of having Sisco there was that if you got him on your side he was able to swing other key people around. He also was very close to Rogers. Sisco was also able to handle Kissinger, who was over at the White House. I recall one time when I got him pointed in the right direction. The automatic reaction, unfortunately, of people at the highest level of government was that when there was a crisis in the Middle East the Sixth Fleet would be alerted and then moved close to the shores of the eastern Mediterranean. Also the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg would be alerted. This would be publicized without any consideration being given to whether these actions might have a negative reaction in the Arab world. I remember going into Sisco saying, “Look, for God's sake don't do this, or if we are going to do it, don't announce it.” Sisco finally agreed with me and picked up the phone to call Kissinger. He told me to get on the other line. He said, “Henry,

we can't move the Sixth Fleet and I will tell you why." He gave him the reason I had given him. Kissinger said, "Is there anyone on this line?" Joe said, "Nope." "Well, Joe, I have to tell you that I have already told the President that we have moved the Sixth Fleet. Joe, I don't care if you only move the Fleet one mile, but just move it to the minimum necessary because I have already told the President." So we moved the Sixth Fleet a few miles. Then of course I kept worrying about when we would turn it back. That was a problem. It took us days to finally tell the Sixth Fleet that it didn't have to move any further and could turn back. That was an example of how you could get to Sisco.

Q: You are saying this looking at books on Kissinger and all, there seemed to be, particularly at this time, much more, almost like children in a way...this telephone bit. Alexander Haig and Larry Eagleburger were kind of monitoring what Kissinger was saying and the NSC would kind of laugh. These were very serious matters, but the way they were being treated by these two powerful eagles and others around was something.

SEELYE: Well, have you read Isaacson's book on Kissinger?

Q: Yes.

SEELYE: I read it having known Kissinger's paranoia and insecurity but I never appreciated the extent of this that the book reveals. I shudder to think of people like that running the government.

In any case, I think Sisco held his own pretty well with Kissinger and in terms of bureaucratic infighting. One of the things that Sisco was a past master at was in what might be called "bull." An Arab ambassador would come in to be briefed and Sisco spoke as if he had all the answers. He would say, "One... Number two... Number three... Number four..." After 45 minutes he made it look as if we had all the answers and that everything was "hunky-dory." The ambassador would walk out impressed. You would walk him down

the corridor and downstairs to his car and then he would be reflecting, “I wonder what Sisco really said.” Sisco just had a way of saying a lot and saying little.

Q: You had Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

SEELYE: But keep in mind at that point Syria and Iraq had broken relations with us, so most of our focus was on Lebanon and Jordan.

Q: We are talking about the 1968-72 period. The civil war had not broken out in Lebanon yet had it?

SEELYE: It had not, but we still had problems then. For example, in December, 1968, in response to some Palestinian guerrilla probings across the border into Israel, the Israelis came across and wiped out practically the whole Middle East Airline fleet at the Beirut Airport. This, of course, upset the Lebanese and it disturbed us. At that point in time we still had the guts, that is the State Department had the guts, probably the last time, to condemn Israel publicly for the action. I don't recall ever since then that we ever condemned Israel without putting it in the context of “we deplore terrorism on both sides.” But in this case we actually condemned the Israeli attack by itself. The Lebanese were quite pleased with this. However, I got a call a few days later from a Rabbi in the Mid West. He was very hostile and very aggressive as they tend to be when it comes to the Middle East. Finally, after ranting and raving about our having condemned Israel for this action, he said to me, “I want you to know that we never turn the other cheek.” In that one moment I realized why Christianity had succeeded. Both Islam and Judaism adhered to an eye-for-an-eye and tooth-for-a-tooth mentality. Christianity ended the constant vendetta that allows people to get along. To this day the Israelis and Arabs have the eye-for-an-eye mentality.

Q: How did Israeli affairs and your affairs get along in the Department?

SEELYE: I think we began to sense increasingly the power of the Zionist Lobby in the U.S., something that had not been evident earlier. In addition, the Israelis then had an Ambassador by the name of Yitzhak Rabin, currently Prime Minister, who had extraordinary access during the Nixon Administration. I recall that frequently when I went in to see Sisco he was on the phone to Rabin. And Rabin was always coming up to see the Secretary, etc. So one sensed also that the power of the Israeli embassy was quite considerable.

At that time, however, there was no one Israeli Embassy official who made a great effort to cultivate Near East office directors. Back in the early sixties there was an Israeli attach# of Iraqi-Jewish extraction, by the name of Darbaim who used to cultivate us desk officers. He used to take us out to lunch and we would have Arabic meals and talk in Arabic and all and got to know him quite well. Perhaps it was felt by the late 1960's that the Lobby could do a better job.

It was during this period when the Rogers Plan was conceived, a plan based on UN Security Council Resolution 242, which called for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories in return for an Arab commitment to peace. The Plan moved the Resolution to implementation. Sisco and Roy Atherton, who by then had moved up to become a deputy assistant secretary, basically drafted the Plan and got Rogers involved. Rogers went out to the region in 1971 to sell this plan to Israel, Egypt and Jordan. I happened to be one of those who went along. One was not aware at that point that Kissinger back at the White House was undermining that plan. I learned that later in reading about it. But the plan failed and, of course, one important reason why it failed was because Kissinger was telling the Israelis from the White House not to pay any attention to it.

The White House-Israeli connection was very strong. I wasn't aware of the extent of it then but was aware that Rabin had a lot of influence on U.S. officials.

Q: In the Foreign Service this can happen that...the Middle East if you boil it down as far as the United States is concerned, the Israeli presence and its relations with the other Arab countries and everything else flows from that. You have a very powerful ambassador who can get anywhere. And then you have what I take it to be other ambassadors, both because of their governments and their abilities, who just don't have that access. Did you almost find yourself having to act as a surrogate to the ambassador?

SEELYE: Surrogate to what, the foreign ambassador?

Q: Yes, to the Lebanese ambassador, the Jordanian ambassador.

SEELYE: No, because Sisco was very good at seeing them. If they wanted to come in to see him, he always made time available. He became very fond of the Lebanese and Jordanian ambassadors. The Jordanian ambassador later became prime minister. I think they both did well. I didn't sense any need to be a surrogate.

Q: How did we view King Hussein at that time?

SEELYE: In those days, during the Nixon Administration, I think that may have been the apogee of the relationship. There was a high regard for King Hussein. During that time we had the Jordan crisis, which I can talk about if you would like?

Q: Yes, please do.

SEELYE: That is the crisis in 1970 when the Palestinian-PLO guerrilla movement had reached a point of becoming a state within a state in Jordan. The guerrillas were setting up roadblocks and interfering with conduct of the affairs of government. King Hussein was trying to react to this in a diplomatic fashion, by negotiation, by talking, which is what everyone wants to do first. He tried to persuade Arafat to cease and desist but was unsuccessful. Arafat was riding high, the PLO was riding high and as we know from history, Arafat unfortunately at times doesn't know when to change course when it would

be in the interests of the PLO to do so. So things were getting tenser and tenser in Jordan. There were demonstrations and I remember at one point there were attacks on American embassy property. Some of our cars in the motor pool were blown up. The embassy was virtually under siege.

Q: Who was our Ambassador at that time?

SEELYE: Well, at that point we had a Charg# and then Dean Brown went out. That was the time that he had to present his credentials in a tank, it was so tense. The Jordanian Ambassador came in quite often in those days. I remember taking him up to Secretary Rogers and preparing a position paper for the Secretary which was cleared through Sisco. As I recall, we suggested that Rogers tell the Jordanian Ambassador that we appreciated everything that King Hussein had done to try to work things out with the PLO, but from our standpoint the PLO had gone too far. The U.S. stood by King Hussein but would have difficulty continuing to stand by if he were increasingly weakened by the PLO. Wasn't it time to stand up to the PLO?

Well, that message was taken back and I don't know how much impact it had on the King, probably marginal. But about that time King Hussein decided that he had to confront the PLO.

Q: His army...there were stories about women's underwear being displayed on tank antenna as a sign of "we are being treated like women."

SEELYE: True. The Jordan army, which is essentially Bedouin and not Palestinian, really wanted to move against the PLO. They were fed up with the way the King was trying to accommodate the PLO. There were signs of their dissatisfaction. The confrontation was a very bloody affair.

The thing that complicated the whole affair was that just before the King decided to confront the PLO a radical wing of the PLO, called the PFLP or Palestinian Popular

Liberation Front, hijacked four American planes and landed them at a remote airstrip in the Jordan desert called Dawson's Landing. We had never heard of this airstrip but obviously the PFLP had heard of it. It had been used in World War II. These four planes suddenly flopped out of the air and landed in the middle of the desert. The passengers were mostly American. They were being held hostage by the PFLP in return for the release of Palestinians being held in Israeli jails. Of course, the Israelis weren't going to respond to that.

So it was a tense period. A task force was created which I headed where we tried to figure out how to ease this crisis. One problem we had was to persuade our allies—there were also some foreign nationals on the planes—not to give in to any of the demands. I think in addition to the demands for the Palestinian prisoners being held in Israel, the hijackers wanted Palestinians being held in European jails also released. So we were trying to hold the line. We contacted the International Red Cross because we wanted somebody to go and at least see the passengers, to see that they were being taken care of, etc.

It was about that time that the Jordanian Ambassador came in as I mentioned earlier and when we thought it was time the Jordanians confronted the PLO. We felt that if the Jordanian situation calmed down, then perhaps we could handle the hijacking situation. They were really two separate developments. Suddenly the passengers were taken off the planes and spread around the refugee camps of Amman. I can't remember quite why they did that. This disturbed us even more because we didn't know where they were and we were afraid that in the confrontation that King Hussein had with the PLO Americans would get killed. Well, there was some very, very bloody fighting. The Arab Legion was mad at these Palestinians and really cut them to pieces and they won the battle. The Palestinian guerrillas were forced to flee to the mountains.

But that still left the problem of all these Americans. Believe it or not, as the dust settled, every one of the fifty or so Americans, maybe more than a hundred, being held emerged unscathed. We heard some remarkable stories. One of the Americans told us that they

ran short of food and their Palestinian hosts risked their lives to go out during the fighting to get food for them. Some day I am going back to the cables to review all this, but I can't remember the details now.

That was the beginning of the turn-around. At the same time you had in Jordan, and had had there ever since the 1967 war, an Iraqi division, which just stayed on. We were constantly worried that the Iraqis would come to the help of the PLO. Fortunately they didn't. Then, the next thing we know we have reports of Syrian tanks crossing the border from Syria into Jordan. The Syrians claimed they were merely Palestinian tanks going to help the PLO, but they were Syrian tanks, of course. At that point the White House got into the act.

I remember one night coming back from the task force, about 9:30. At 9:45 there was a call from Al Haig saying that Joe Sisco wanted me to come right down to attend a meeting that Henry Kissinger, then NSC Advisor, was having. So I turned around and went back. That night it so happened there was a black tie dinner at the Airlie House attended by Melvin Laird, Kissinger and Sisco among others. So on the way back apparently Kissinger had decided that they ought to have a WASAG meeting (Washington Special Action Group) set up by Kissinger to handle emergencies. Sisco apparently called Haig and said to get Seelye, I want to have him with me when we talk about this.

So we went into the WASAG meeting. What to do? The Syrians had invaded. King Hussein, even though he had rolled back the PLO, was now threatened by an invading force. Iraqi troops were there. What should be done? If my memory serves me well, I remember Sisco turning to me and saying, “Well, obviously some military intervention is needed. Is it better to be U.S. military or Israeli military?” I said, off the top of my head, “The last thing we want is U.S. military involvement.” I felt that once you had the U.S. military shedding Arab blood then you risked repercussions that might affect on our embassies in the Middle East. While Israel is considered an instrumentality of the United States, I didn't think that an Israeli attack would cause as serious a reaction against

American institutions. I said to Sisco, “If somebody has to intervene—and I hope that this will not be required—I would think it would be better to have the Israelis do so.” And that was what Sisco announced to the group. Now I read in other publications, like the book on Kissinger, that other people made that decision. In any case, it was at that meeting that I strongly recommended to Sisco against U.S. military intervention. Other people had argued in favor of it, but the final decision was that if necessary the Israeli troops would be deployed to do that.

Okay, so the next day this word is conveyed to the Israelis, be prepared to intervene on behalf of King Hussein but by air to knock out the tanks, because the Jordanian air force is very weak. The Israelis sent back word to us that this operation could not be limited to an air operation, they would have to go in by land as well. We didn't like that idea in Washington. We figured that that would be the beginning of another Israeli occupation. So we said, “Well, in that case we will have to think this proposition over for a couple of days.” Then two things happened. One, King Hussein's air force was pretty effective in knocking out a few Syrian tanks; secondly, Hafez al-Assad back in Syria, who was then Chief of the Air Force, refused to give air cover to this column that had been sent in by Saleh al-Jadid, the Prime Minister. The Syrian column started pulling out. So Hafez al-Assad's action, together with the Jordanian air force action, caused the withdrawal of the column just at the point we were holding back authorizing the Israelis to move because they wanted to go in by land. So we never had to use the Israelis. I have never heard that exact version in any book I have read so far. But that is my own clear memory of it.

Q: Why did Assad do what he did?

SEELYE: Well, we now know that Assad and Jadid were at odds. There were two wings of the Baath Party at that point, the ideologues and the relative pragmatists. The ideologues had already begun to change the nature of Syrian society in accordance with “Arab socialism.” Assad was more in favor of concentrating on Arab unity. He didn't care much about ideology. And there was a rivalry for leadership. Assad saw his action as a way

of discrediting Jadid. And, indeed, the withdrawal did discredit Jadid and was one of the spring boards that enabled Assad to take over and become president of Syria shortly thereafter.

So the Israelis never had to move. But to this day I believe that if we had authorized an Israeli ground intervention they would still be occupying the Irbid Heights of Jordan.

Q: At the beginning of this crisis when we were telling Hussein enough is enough you had better start doing something about this, and then with the Americans being caught up in the whole thing, was this operation, until it really started to blow up because of the Syrian threat and all, being run pretty much from the State Department, or was the NSC in it?

SEELYE: I didn't know then what the White House was doing because Kissinger was a back channel man. We now know from this book by Isaacson that Kissinger used the back channels in spades.

Q: This book you mention by Isaacson is called "Kissinger," and is very interesting.

SEELYE: So, I don't know what Kissinger was sending to our ambassadors. I only know what we were sending and receiving.

The most important point to be made is that Kissinger and Nixon portrayed the crisis in terms of standing up to the Soviets and standing them down. The way they had portrayed it is that the Soviets conspired in the Syrian invasion of Jordan. The Soviets were strong supporters of the PLO but it is doubtful that they had much to do with the PLO actions in Jordan or influenced the Syrians to invade. But the Administration claimed that the Soviets had suffered a major defeat. I remember that when the crisis was over journalists would pop into my office and say, "We are told by the White House that the U.S. stood the Soviets down." "That's a lot of poppycock," I said. "Our intelligence indicated that the Soviets were urging the Syrians to exercise restraint and not to get involved in this thing. They had no hand in the PLO buildup in Jordan or in the PLO operation in Syria. Don't

believe the White House." Many years later, Kissinger said to me (when I was in AF), "I remember you, you were always giving me a hard time." He must have referred to these conversations that I had with these correspondents, which presumably got back to him.

Q: Did you have any feeling that Kissinger had more or less laid out most of the Soviet Union, China and all that as where he was going to go; that he was leaving the Middle East because he was Jewish, more or less in the hands of Rogers in the State Department, in the early years?

SEELYE: Yes, in the early years, but in this case I think he took a very active interest in the Jordanian crisis. This time I think, despite all our efforts, there was some movement of the Sixth Fleet and this sort of thing. I remember when the Americans were being held on the planes, I said to Sisco, "We can't do anything to provoke these guys. They will shoot our Americans." And I think we got the White House to hold off for a while but I think eventually they moved the Sixth Fleet.

So I think Kissinger did focus on it. I didn't deal with Kissinger. But I do know that Kissinger had WASAG meetings and Alexis Johnson would go to those meetings and once or twice I would be taken along.

Q: Were we concerned about where the Palestinians would end up after this war?

SEELYE: I have to say that there wasn't much sympathy for the Palestinian plight in Jordan. I think we all felt that Arafat had exceeded the bounds of reasonable behavior there and we were greatly concerned about the survivability of King Hussein at that point. So we really weren't much concerned then about what would happen to the PLO if they got cut to pieces. We felt, I think, that what it got was what they deserved. Later on, a few months later, the Jordanians went in to the mountains and cut them up some more. They had taken refuge in Ajlouri in the mountains. That is when they fled through Syria and into Lebanon. It was the Jordan crisis that led to the Lebanese crisis.

Q: During this period, we are talking about 1968-72, was the PLO causing problems in Lebanon?

SEELYE: Even before the PLO guerrillas got there, Palestinians caused problems. I remember there was a famous Cairo agreement signed in 1969 between the Lebanese and Palestinian organizations which, as I recall, allowed Palestinian guerrillas to function in Lebanon to a limited extent. So the Lebanese were already having problems with them. But when this whole big guerrilla force moved in from Jordan, that really compounded the problem.

Q: Looking at Lebanese affairs, was there concern that the Maronites were having too much influence with our embassy? These were the social people of the area. They also have whatever the lobby is in the United States.

SEELYE: Yes, the Maronites cultivated our embassy people. And I recall that our ambassador there once made a request for modest funds to help finance a Maronite publication. I recommended that we refuse this because I felt we would be drawn into taking sides in Lebanese politics if we did so. I remember he came back from Beirut, among other things, to plead the case. We had a meeting with Sisco and he made a case of how we should help these people; it was just a modest amount of money. Sisco turned to me and said, “Tal, I want you to give them the money.” I went back and never did anything. Sisco never followed up on it. He was doing that in front of our ambassador. Sisco had confidence in me, and he supported my judgment. He just let the matter drop. And I let it drop. That is what the White House staff used to do, whenever Nixon gave ridiculous orders. Half the time they would ignore them. Our ambassador was a good man, but he was not an experienced Middle East hand.

Q: Who was our ambassador?

SEELYE: Dwight Porter. He had no background in the Middle East. I don't think he had sensitivity about the dangers of getting pulled into the Maronite orbit.

Q: Were we able to get any feel in Lebanon at that time of what was going on in the Muslim community, which later became sort of the root cause...

SEELYE: Well, the root cause was the Shiite Muslims. At that time I don't think we really had enough of a sense of the potential problems that could be generated from that community. We knew that most of the Shiites lived in the south and that the south was not as well off as the rest of Lebanon. Like any central government southern regions tend to be ignored. At that point there was no suggestion that the Shiites were a political problem. The Speaker of the House, according to the original covenant that set up Lebanon, was a Shiite. But in those days the Shiites were a small minority in the government. It has been the population explosion that has made them into the largest single group there.

Q: What about Syria? Syria always seems to be the odd man out in the Middle East from our policy point of view. Here it is, it has a lot of potential but doesn't seem to be able to have the impact as some of the others do, Egypt or Iraq. Impact on U.S. and also in the area. What were our interests in Syria and how do we view Syria?

SEELYE: At that time, of course, we had no diplomatic relations with Syria. Our main operational concerns were our Interests Section in Damascus. Maintaining it and making sure money got to the Italians who had taken it over.

Q: Did we have officers there?

SEELYE: No, no. No officers.

Q: It wasn't like we did in Cairo?

SEELYE: No, neither Iraqi nor Syrian Interest Sections had any officers.

At that point (Assad took over in 1970) Syria was considered a radical regime. Until Assad took over Syria hadn't played much of a role or attempted to play much of a role in regional political dynamics.

As regard to Lebanon, Syria's presence was nowhere near what it has been since then, since 1976. Syria always felt that Lebanon was geographically part of Syria. Relations were reasonably good, but Lebanese governments who made decisions in those days did not have to defer to Syria as they do now. So Syria's role in Lebanon was modest until 1976. There were a lot of Syrian workers working there. I don't recall during this period, even when there were crises in Lebanon, Syria had much of a role to play.

Q: How did we at that time view the influence of the Soviet Union in the Middle East?

SEELYE: Well, of course, old hands, like me, always took a jaundiced view of the propensity of Washington, even before Kissinger came along, to view Middle East problems in cold war terms. And of course Kissinger developed that to an nth degree. Before he came along we had the Baghdad Pact which was an effort to build up a buffer against Soviet influence. Instead it helped to inspire nationalists like Nasser to come along. Then we had the Middle East Defense Organization, which involved handing out money to Arab governments to build up their so-called anti-communist military defenses. None of us, or very few of us, really believed in this sort of thing.

Then, of course, in the late fifties, countries like Syria began to move more into the Soviet orbit as a reaction to our strong support to Israel and because of actions Israel was taking. Our refusal to help Syria, ourselves, militarily turned them to the Soviets for military aid. It was as simple as that. There was a radical regime in Syria before the Baath took over. But when the Baath took over there was a propensity in some parts of Washington to say that Syria was pro-Soviet. The Middle East hands knew that the Baathists were anti-communist, anti-Marxist. I never believed that a Baath regime was going to hand over Syria to the Soviets. And, of course, they didn't. When Assad came in he kept the Soviets

at arms length. So anybody who understood Syria in those days knew that the Soviets had very minimal influence in Syria. They provided military assistance, yes. And in that sense some people were concerned because on paper the large quantity of Syrian arms made Syria look as if it was a match for the Israeli army. But anybody who knew the Syrian army as I did, knew that was a lot of malarkey.

Q: How did you know the Syrian army?

SEELYE: All you had to do was to drive between Jordan, Syria and Lebanon in the early fifties and see what a crummy bunch the Syrian military were. We could also tell that the quality of leadership was limited and they weren't very good at maintaining their equipment, etc. So the Syrian military threat was always a myth in the view of people like me, at least. And, of course, when Kissinger came along he tried to propagate this view.

Q: You have the 1967 war which knocks out a number of places where Foreign Service officers can go which is Iraq, Syria and to some extent Egypt. Did you see a decrease in recruiting new people for the Middle East? As an old Arabist, did you feel it a duty to try to bring new blood into the field? (end first section)

SEELYE: I don't recall that we were ever called upon to try to bring people into the Service who might specialize in Arab affairs. I sensed, however, that for a period of time fewer Foreign Service officers chose to take Arab studies. That was the case, I think. I think the closing of the posts may have affected the disposition of many Foreign Service officers to make this a specialty. I think that is true. And I sensed a hiatus as time went on with regard to officers with experience in the Middle East.

Q: Did you get called upon to go over to the FSI from time to time to talk about the Arab world? I am just thinking about the feed of the next generation.

SEELYE: I don't ever remember being asked to talk at the FSI while I was an FSO, but I was asked to talk regularly at the military training school that sent officers out to our military mission in Saudi Arabia.

Q: It just occurred to me what we did about training the next generation?

SEELYE: Why didn't they bring in the desk officers and office directors? My mind is a blank, but maybe I did go over there.

Q: No, I am sure it would have registered.

SEELYE: You would think that they would have tapped us, you know, the way the military did, but I just don't recall that.

Q: Is there anything else we might cover in this particular period?

SEELYE: There was an amusing vignette that happened during the Jordan crisis. One night, about 10:00, up on the seventh floor, Secretary Rogers came in in black tie as he had just been to a dinner party. He wanted to hear about the four airplanes that had just been hijacked with American passengers and had landed in the Jordanian desert. He had heard that a number of the passengers were from New York state and he asked me what towns they were from. I said that they were from Syracuse, Albany and places like that. He said, “Oh, I thought maybe they were from cow country.” I pricked up my ears and said, “Cow country? What cow country did you mean?” And he said, “Well, a county that we call cow country up in New York state. You wouldn't have heard of it.” I said, “Well, are you talking about St. Lawrence County?” He said, “Yes,” and looked up in surprise. It is a county up near the Canadian border. I said, “Do you come from there?” And he said, “Yes, I come from there.” And I said, “What town do you come from?” And he said, “A small town you never would have heard of.” I said, “Canton, New York?” He said, “Yes.” I had gone to

high school there. I lived there for five years, and it turned out he played basketball for the same coach that I had ten years before.

Q: Your next assignment was what everybody comes into the Foreign Service and prepares for, to be ambassador. How did this come about?

SEELYE: While I was at that job, during the early part of the Jordan crisis and before the 1970 confrontation with the PLO, Harry Symmes was pulled out of Amman as our Ambassador. I am afraid he had been requested to leave by the Jordanians. There was a hiatus and somebody came to me and asked if I would like to be considered for ambassador to Jordan. I said no. I had just been on the desk a relatively short time and just didn't feel, for various reasons, that I wanted the job. That must have been some time in 1969. Then in 1971, Sisco called me in and said, “How would you like to be ambassador to Kuwait?” I said, “Sure.” In fact, I remember going on vacation and getting material on Kuwait. I got back and he said, “Forget it, Bill Stoltzfus is going there.” Apparently Vice President Agnew had been out to Saudi Arabia and liked Stoltzfus and wanted to give him the job in Kuwait. I said, “Fine.”

It is funny how these things happen. You would think the Foreign Service would have had a more organized, structured way to appoint Ambassadors. Later I was taking a carpool with someone who was in African affairs. In those days North Africa was part of African Affairs. He said to me, “Did you know that Arch Calhoun has just been withdrawn as ambassador to Tunisia. So Tunisia is coming open.” So one day I was in Sisco's office on something else and I said, “By the way Joe, I have been here four years and maybe it is time to go somewhere else. I understand Tunisia is open.” He said, “Really? Would you like to go?” I said, “Yep.” So I guess Sisco goes to the Secretary and puts my name into the State Department hopper and I was just lucky to be the one selected. But isn't it funny how those things happen? Not that my hearing of it meant I would get it, but at least it got my name into the hopper.

Q: Was there any problem with confirmation or anything like that?

SEELYE: No. Actually it was very easy.

Q: You were in Tunisia from 1972-76. What was the situation?

SEELYE: Let me tell you the story of my arrival. As you know Tunisia is bilingual—French and Arabic—and before I left I was told I would be received at the airport and would be expected to make some remarks upon my arrival. So I asked colleagues in North African Affairs whether I should do it in French or Arabic. Some said French and some said Arabic. So I decided to do it my way. I prepared my remarks and had them written out. I arrived and started out in French for the first half, and in the middle I switched to Arabic. It was like the difference between night and day. People who were looking bored suddenly perked up when I started Arabic. The chief of protocol almost jumped out of his seat. The correspondents came up to me afterwards. And that was the reason I had done it that way. I felt this switch from French to Arabic would cause attention. And from then on I noticed when I traveled around Tunisia people would comment that they had seen me speaking Arabic on TV. So it turned out to be a good thing to do.

Q: I take it that Tunisia was not a post where we sent people who spoke Arabic?

SEELYE: I was the first Ambassador to do so. This was unusual.

Q: Would you say that as a practical thing Arabic was really what was spoken further down the line?

SEELYE: No it was a break for me, essentially. I had never used French in the Foreign Service, although I had studied French and took a little Berlitz under the GI Bill while waiting to enter the Foreign Service. So I saw this as an opportunity to improve my French and keep up my Arabic. I used my French essentially with the Tunisians, although not always, because Tunisian Arabic is quite different from the standard Arabic. So when I

spoke to a gardener I had to speak in French. But an educated Tunisian could understand standard Arabic, of course. So I used both, actually. I think it was good to have an Arabist there because it is an Arab country, a member of the Arab League. They were pleased to have somebody who speaks Arabic.

Q: What was the situation when you arrived?

SEELYE: Well, I was told before I arrived that President Bourguiba had six months to live, a year at the most. He is still alive at the age of 90 something. He was already getting somewhat senile and had had some illnesses. The result was he was under medication, under doctor's care. They would sort of pump him up in the morning and he would be alert and dynamic and his charismatic self, and in the afternoon he would kind of sleep off the drugs. So he was fading but was still a powerful president. I found him to be the most charismatic head of an Arab state that I ever met and I have met Faisal, Assad and Hussein, all very powerful in their way, but he was charismatically powerful in his personality. He had sparkling blue eyes and his chin would stick out when he addressed you. And he was very well disposed toward the United States. He considered France and the United States his two best “friends” without exception. His American connection started really with a Foreign Service officer. You probably have heard the story many times.

Q: Hooker Doolittle?

SEELYE: Yes. Hooker Doolittle was our consul in Tunis in the early forties. When the Germans invaded North Africa in 1942, Tunisia became a German protectorate. I am not sure whether Hooker Doolittle was there during the occupation, but he certainly was there when the Germans withdrew in 1943 after we defeated the Germans. Habib Bourguiba, who had been arrested by the French in the thirties for his activities as a Tunisian nationalist, had been incarcerated in France. When the Germans defeated France in 1940 they only occupied Paris and a portion of France. When we invaded North Africa, they occupied the rest of France, which meant they occupied the town in

which Bourguiba was incarcerated. They released him from prison and told him they wanted him to support them there. Bourguiba said he would not do that, but they left him alone and he went back to Tunisia. Somehow Doolittle got to know him and realized that while Bourguiba was a nationalist, he was a Francophile. He was not opposed to French influence or contacts. So when the French came back in, after the Allied victory, the French Resident General heard about this American consul who was interfering in internal affairs of French-Tunisian activities. One day Doolittle went to the French authorities because at that point Bourguiba had gone into hiding because the French wanted to rearrest him. Doolittle told the French authorities that this was a good man who was friendly to France. He just wanted an independent country. Doolittle recommended that Bourguiba be left alone. Finally, Bourguiba managed to escape at which point the French were quite upset and complained to Eisenhower about the American consul who was interfering in their affairs. Eisenhower got Doolittle transferred to Alexandria as vice consul to stamp visas at our consulate there. And ironically three or four years later, he was still there when Bourguiba applied for a visa to go to the United States to work for independence.

Well, Bourguiba recalled Doolittle with such warmth that almost every time I called upon him, the first thing he would talk about was Hooker Doolittle. And indeed, after independence, one of the first things he did was to invite Hooker Doolittle back, then retired from the Foreign Service, and gave him the red carpet treatment. So it was Doolittle who started the American connection, and then, of course in the mid fifties we were a strong supporter of Tunisian independence, and that reinforced it.

Q: I understand there is a Hooker Doolittle Street there.

SEELYE: Yes, I think there is. He was related to the famous General Jimmy Doolittle.

So it is nice to know that your country was held in high esteem and that helped me a lot there.

Q: What were American interests in Tunisia?

SEELYE: The first interest was the opportunity for Tunisia to serve as a model third world country as a recipient of economic aid. Our AID program, of course, was developing. We thought that because of the enlightened nature of its society and leadership, plus a capable working class, we could make Tunisia a model for AID success. So we went in there with a substantial AID program and worked hard at that. That was number one.

Number two, as the Soviet fleet began to operate in the Mediterranean and flex its muscles, Tunisia became more important to us strategically—located athwart the narrow Straits of Sicily. Therefore in a cold war context it had that kind of importance.

Then, I think in terms of Arab politics we saw Tunisia as a very moderate country. Bourguiba was a very moderate leader. And he had the guts to stand up and say what he thought. In 1967 he visited the West Bank, which was then part of Jordan, where he went to a Palestinian refugee camp. Here he announced that it was time for the Arabs to make peace with Israel. At which point Tunisia was kicked out of the Arab League for a while. But Bourguiba at the same time was a strong believer in a Palestinian state—in Palestinians having their own country. So he was a moderate force in the Arab world and the Tunisians were important in that sense.

I guess those were the three important reasons.

Also, with Qadhafi of Libya next door it was important that there be a moderate counterweight in Tunisia.

Q: In your contacts with Bourguiba, his son was foreign minister wasn't he?

SEELYE: Not while I was there.

Q: Was there anything implicit or explicit about if Qadhafi and Libya start messing around in your country we will give whatever support we can?

SEELYE: No, that developed later. That developed in the 1980s when Qadhafi was flexing his muscles—and before the Israelis bombed the PLO headquarters—we had assured Tunisia that we would provide support if Tunisia were threatened. However, we hadn't expected the enemy to be Israel, of course. Bourguiba always kept his military very small. He wanted to keep the military out of politics. So he did rely on the Sixth Fleet umbrella. We had Sixth Fleet visits every now and then to reassure him. He once told me in the presence of the Sixth Fleet Commander that he considered the Sixth Fleet his “bouclic,” his shield. But in my time there was no undertaking to defend Tunisia against Qadhafi.

Q: What was the role of the French during this time?

SEELYE: Their relationship was similar to ours. Bourguiba thought very highly of the French. The French Ambassador and I were the two ambassadors he would rely on. Once his prime minister was away from the country and he had a foreign minister by the name of Mohammed Masmoudi, who had been in cahoots with Qadhafi. I think Qadhafi was paying him off. Masmoudi kind of liked to cultivate the radical elements. I knew what Masmoudi was like and I tried to develop a good relationship with him. I knew he liked Cuban cigars, so I always brought one to him. One day, he persuaded the President to go down to Jerba, which is an island off Tunisia adjacent to the Libyan border, to meet with Qadhafi. The meeting was on TV. It was Sunday and we all watched and were surprised to see as the meeting went on that there was talk about unity between Tunisia and Libya. There had been no advance notice of anything like this. The next thing we knew there was Bourguiba being led in kind of a fog to a table and given a pen and he signed a unity document. It was announced that Tunisia and Libya had united. It shocked everybody else in Tunisia. Bourguiba flew back to Tunis that night and word of the unity declaration got back to the Prime Minister, who was in Paris. He immediately flew back to Tunisia and called me that night. The British and Italian Ambassadors wanted to see me. They arrived quite upset

wondering what was going to happen. I said, “Don't worry, Bourguiba was in a funk when he signed the document and it won't last more than a couple of days.” They said they were worried. Late that night I got a call from the Prime Minister who said that I had an appointment with the President the next day at 9:00. He didn't say why. So I put two and two together and assumed that he wanted me to discourage the President from going through with this.

Well, I decided I wasn't going to tell him what to do. I was just going to ask him a lot of leading questions. Where was the capital going to be? How did this affect the U.S. relationship? So I spent my one half hour with the President just asking questions and raising issues, etc. and left it at that. Much to my surprise, in behind me came the French Ambassador. Obviously, the Prime Minister had called him too. I guess the French Ambassador provably more or less raised some of the same questions.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister obviously was working hard to turn the thing around and was pointing out the pitfalls and stupidity of the thing. Sure enough within two or three days the announcement was made that unity had been canceled. The whole thing was finis. And it was reflective of Bourguiba's just being at a low point and Masmoudi's being able to lead him down the garden path. Well, after that the son of Bourguiba (Bibi) was particularly upset with Masmoudi. One day he came to me and said, “The Prime Minister and I have been talking, we would like you to go and see the President and get him to dump Masmoudi.” I said, “I can't do that. This is none of my business.” I didn't even cable Washington for instructions. I found that as Ambassador you do what you think is right. I said, “Look, the U.S. can't get involved. Firstly, I can't go to the President, and secondly, how can I have more influence than you, his son, and the Prime Minister who is his designate? I just don't understand it.” I still don't understand it to this day. And he went away unhappy. Masmoudi stayed on quite a while. I can't remember how they finally got rid of him. But to this day I am amazed that the son of the President would come to

me on this. But again that showed the President attached a lot of importance to what the American representative would say to him.

Q: Did you and the French Ambassador kind of compare notes from time to time?

SEELYE: Yes. There was a great French Ambassador. Normally, as you know, the French try to undercut our interests. Often French ambassadors are undercutting us, and when I went to Damascus, that is later on, Dick Murphy said, “Watch out for the French Ambassador.” But in Tunisia, he was very responsive. He happened to be a Protestant from Lyon, a very cultivated man, very cosmopolitan, very friendly to me. We used to compare notes all the time. In fact, he was one of the few people who understood and appreciated the modern art which my wife had borrowed for our embassy. His successor was a little different so I didn't have the same relationship. But we were together about two years, this French Ambassador and I.

One thing did happen which was amusing concerning the French. Just after my French friend left, Giscard d'Estaing came to Tunisia. He was President at that time. Everyday I used to look at both the French and Arabic newspapers. I would at least scan the headlines. When the Arabic newspaper came the day that Giscard arrived there was a picture of me on the front page. I wondered what I was doing on the front page. I looked under the picture and it said, “Giscard d'Estaing.” If it had been my old friend, I would have called the French Ambassador and joked with him about it, but the new French Ambassador was a little bit stiff and I didn't know him. They had just put my picture in by mistake. I still have it as a memento, but you had to understand Arabic to understand the amusing aspect of it. I wonder to this day if the French knew about it because their officials didn't read Arabic.

Q: What was the impact of the 1973 war? This is the one where Egypt made a surprise attack on Israel (Yom Kippur War) and did well in the beginning but it all fell apart.

SEELYE: Well, the first evening of the war Bourguiba got on the radio and TV and said, “We have a Jewish community here in Tunisia which is loyal, it has been here for centuries. They are indigenous and part of our society. I will not allow anybody to hurt a hair on their heads. They are loyal Tunisians.” He said that immediately so there would not be any outbreaks against the Tunisian Jewish community. And there weren't.

There was a coolness for a while against the United States because of our support for Israel and the fact that Egypt was getting defeated near the end. But it was never reflected in any overt action and it soon dissipated. I don't recall being called in by the Foreign Minister or Prime Minister to complain. Maybe they did, but I just don't recall it. Just sort of a coolness for a while. We had a lot of Tunisian friends, but for a few months they thought it was unwise to invite any Americans to their parties.

Q: How did the Tunisians view Egypt? You had a new man in power, Sadat.

SEELYE: Well, Tunisia had good relations with Egypt. They also had a common interest in opposing Qadhafi because Qadhafi was causing problems for both the Tunisian government and the Egyptian government. At one point Qadhafi sent across some agents to Gafsa in southern Tunisia and they tried to cause a demonstration and start some kind of uprising. But they failed. And, of course, Qadhafi was trying to do the same thing in Egypt. So the two nations had a common interest in opposing Qadhafi. As I recall, they got along pretty well, the Egyptians and the Tunisians.

Q: Was there any concern at that time about what is now called Islamic Fundamentalism?

SEELYE: No. In those days they pretty much didn't exist. Bourguiba, of course, was a secularist and one of the platforms of “Bourgabisme,” as they called it, was to secularize as much as possible while being good Moslems. In fact, Bourguiba went so far one time during Ramadan—as you know during Ramadan you cannot eat or drink—of appearing on television during the day with a glass of water in front of him. He sipped the water

while telling Tunisians you could be good Moslems and still drink water and eat food during Ramadan. He said you should do that because otherwise you lose productivity, and productivity is important to society's well being. Well, just about everything else Bourguiba had done to reform the country had worked, but this didn't work. That was too much. People would not accept that. But I didn't sense during my time that there was any active fundamentalist movement in Tunisia.

Q: Did you get involved at all in trying to promote American commerce?

SEELYE: To a very limited extent, because it was such a French market. There were very few American firms who showed any interest in Tunisia. The traditional problem with American firms, at least in the past, was that they didn't have the patience to spend enough time building the building blocks required for a market for their products. I found that all over the Middle East. They would go for a few days or a week and then leave, whereas the Japanese and the French would spend weeks and months cultivating people, getting a feel of the lay of the land and understanding the local mentality.

Also Tunisia was a French-speaking country and few American businessmen spoke French. So there was very little American interest in trade. I remember somebody coming through who wanted to involve his firm in agribusiness in Tunisia, and we encouraged the Tunisians to take a good look at this. But unfortunately in those days there was still an aftermath of the French colonial presence. In 1961, four years after independence, the French farmers were kicked out and all their lands were nationalized. Therefore, when somebody like an American agribusiness person came along and wanted to lease land for a particular period of time, the Tunisians turned him down because this had echoes of foreigners running the land. That would have been a good business opportunity for an American firm. Since then, the Tunisians have waived their requirement.

There was one company there that imported American used clothes in tremendous quantities. These American used clothes shipped abroad are often in very good shape. Otherwise there was minimal American commercial interest in Tunisia.

Q: What about Algeria? Algeria had been independent for some time but was going economically down the tubes. Was Bourguiba and the group around him pointing to Algeria and saying, "Here it is not working?"

SEELYE: Well, Tunisia wanted to maintain good relations with Algeria. During the Algerian revolution the Tunisians gave asylum to Algerians and Algerian guerrillas in Tunisia. They felt a strong identify with Algeria. But there was no way they wanted to copy Algeria economically because Algeria had become very socialist in its economy. Tunisia had its experience with socialism between 1967-69, when they had a man by the name of Ahmed Ben Saleh, a very bright, active minister of agriculture, who at one point had six portfolios, and decided to nationalize everything. Maybe it was partly the vibes from Algeria that carried over and Bourguiba went along with it. He went so far as to nationalize retail outfits. But the government had its comeuppance because when it tried to nationalize the olive groves along the coast in the south, which had been in private hands for ages, the farmers resisted. Some people were killed and suddenly these things changed. Bourguiba decided they weren't going to nationalize anymore. He kicked out Ben Saleh, arrested him. The whole focus of economic development shifted back to privatization. So from 1969 on, the whole emphasis was on privatizing and has been ever since. So Tunisia experimented with socialism and decided it didn't like it.

Q: How about Tunisia and the UN? Did you find yourself going up, as every ambassador does?

SEELYE: Oh, yes, those usual circular telegrams. Tunisia was pretty good at the UN, they were helpful to us. We never had any problems with them at the UN.

Q: Were you ever called up while you were there to use Tunisia as sort of a cat's paw on some Arab problem we were having?

SEELYE: One of the things that happened there during my early days was the sad occurrence in the Sudan, Khartoum, when Cleo Noel and Curt Moore were assassinated. Shortly thereafter, I don't know if it was a day or two after, my station chief came to me and said that he had a report that these assassins or their accomplices were coming to Tunisia. Now we know in retrospect that those people were held in arrest, so it must have been their associates. There was concern about their intentions. So I cabled Washington and told them I just wanted to make sure they had this information. I indicated that we had two choices. I could share this information with the Tunisians so they could intercept them. On the other hand, I had been told by my station chief that if we informed the Tunisians, we would compromise a very sensitive source. I asked Washington what it wanted me to do? I got a midnight call from Washington saying to tell the Tunisians and to get a bodyguard. So I told the Tunisians and temporarily had a Marine bodyguard. The Tunisians were concerned about this report and supposedly they intercepted them, I don't know, and then assigned me a bodyguard from the Presidential Palace. That person became my bodyguard from then on, all because of the Khartoum business. You know once these arrangements start, you can never end them.

Now in connection with that whole affair, I remember after it happened I got instructions from Washington to go in and strongly complain to the Tunisians about this terrible thing that had happened in the Sudan and that we expected all friendly governments to publicly denounce it. So I went in to see Bourguiba on this and he unfortunately kind of passed it off. He didn't respond the way Washington had hoped he would respond. Washington was furious that Bourguiba had not out of hand said, “This is outrageous and despicable, I will condemn it and will go on TV tomorrow.” A rocket came back from Washington instructing me to go back and tell the guy that he had to say something. Instead, I went to his chef de cabinet, a very nice and cooperative individual. I went to his home. I said, “I have a

problem here. Washington is very upset that the President is not taking a stronger position about this. We are very upset about this. These are two very good friends of mine. It is a shocking incident. I am upset. Isn't there something that you people can do to be a little more responsive on this?" He said, "I understand." So he gave me a response which was just what I needed. I forget whether he used Bourguiba's name or not. Anyway he got me off the hook.

Q: Were there any other events that took place while you were in Tunisia that you would like to mention?

SEELYE: Yes, there is a dramatic event that happened there. In March, 1973, there were terrible floods in the Majerda Valley, north of Tunis. It had rained for many, many days and waters were rising and suddenly the dam at the head of the valley burst and the waters surged higher. The Prime Minister called me in at 4:00 that afternoon and said, "Please come to my office in a hurry." When I got there he said, "We have a critical situation developing. Our farmers literally have sought refuge on housetops as the waters are rising. We are afraid they are going to be washed away. We have to do something about it. What can you do about it?" I said, "Well, we have helicopters in the Sixth Fleet." "Oh," he said, "Can't you bring them here by nightfall?" I said, "Look, nightfall is only an hour and a half away. That would be a miracle. But I will try to get help by the first thing in the morning." So I went back and used a radio telephone to reach the Sixth Fleet Commander. Miraculously I got him. "Well," he said, "my main aircraft carrier with helicopters has gone off to Vietnam. I have another one headed north towards Sardinia that has a few helicopters on it which I will turn around forthwith and point it towards Tunisia. I will try to have the helicopters there by dawn."

I didn't check with Washington beforehand. I probably cabled Washington at that point telling them what I was doing, I don't recall. I must have.

I then called the Prime Minister to tell him what I was doing. I said, “Would you like to go with me on the lead helicopter?” He said, “No, but I will assign one of my ministers.” So he was at the airport with me first thing in the morning. The first two helicopters arrived and the plan was that we would go on a reconnaissance mission to see what the extent of the need was. Meanwhile we had a Tunisian non-com assigned to each helicopter who spoke Arabic for communication with those being rescued. We started off and hadn't gone but a few miles when we saw two people waving from a rooftop, with the water really way up there. So the other helicopter, as if this had been an exercise planned for ages, lowered a rope with a swing. The helicopter pulled up one guy and then pulled up the other guy. The Minister was looking out the window watching this and said, “Fantastique! Extraordinaire!” As if it had all been planned.

We realized that our helicopter would also have to go on a rescue mission. So we started to look for people to rescue. As we hovered over rooftops, we had a difficult time convincing people they would be safe being pulled up into the helicopters. They were scared. So instead of lowering the swing, we would lower a sort of a platform and this way we could bring up whole families. They were just scared to death with us hovering over them and the water just pouring around. The currents were heavy. Finally, we got about 40 people crammed into the helicopter, sitting in the aisles. We took them to high land. We did that two or three times. Then we returned.

Finally, helicopters arrived from Italy, France and Libya. But we were the first off. The minister was very appreciative. The Prime Minister called me up and said, “This is terrific.” The helicopter pilot said to me, “This is the best thing we have done in the last year. Most of the time we just pick up our pilots out of the ocean. Here we are doing something useful.”

So that is an example of the kind of thing we could do for Tunisia and they appreciated it.

Q: What were you doing from 1976-78?

SEELYE: I was called back to Washington. I was told in October, 1975 by Roy Atherton who was then visiting Tunisia that I could expect to extend to three years. So I was patting myself on my back thinking I had another year in this lovely country. Suddenly, out of the blue—in fact we were planning to go to England to put my daughter in school—I got a call in early December from William Schaufele saying, “I want you to come back and be my deputy.” I said, “Deputy for what?” He said, “For African Affairs.” I said, “I know about North African affairs but nothing about the rest of the continent.” Well, he still wanted me. I said, “Let me check into this.” So I called Atherton, who was Assistant Secretary of NEA, and said, “Roy, I got a call from Bill Schaufele and he says I should come back as his deputy. You told me in October that I would be staying. What is the story?” Roy is often a man of few words. All he said was, “The Secretary likes you.” That was Henry Kissinger. I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “The Secretary likes you. He wants you to come back and take that job.” So, I had no choice. There it was. So I called Bill Schaufele back and said, “Well, Bill, tell me more about this.” He said, “I would like you to start as soon as possible.” I said, “Well, I'm coming home on home leave in two weeks and we can talk about it.” I came home on home leave and we talked. He said that he wanted me to manage AF. He wanted me right away. I said, “Well, I need 2-3 months to finish things off. The Vice President is coming on a visit in March. How about my staying until the end of March?” “Okay,” he said. So at the end of March I came back to become Senior Deputy Assistant Secretary at AF.

Q: We will close now and next time let's start with the Vice President's visit to Tunisia and then your return to Washington.

SEELYE: Okay.

Q: Today is January 24, 1994. Talcott, we want to talk about Nelson Rockefeller's visit as Vice President before we move on to your going into AF.

SEELYE: Well, Nelson Rockefeller's visit to Tunisia was not terribly significant. The reason he visited Tunisia was on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of Tunisia's independence. I had urged that the Administration send a senior official. I couldn't have been happier that they sent the second ranking American official to attend the affair. Of course, Rockefeller was a consummate politician, and excellent glad-handler and he fit in and mixed very well. All major countries were represented. Not all at such a high rank. I recall at the large reception held for all the visitors Rockefeller was kind of the focal point. And of course he handled his contacts in inimitable style. My wife escorted Happy, Rockefeller's wife, as she was also there. I don't recall anything very significant happening. We took them on a visit to Carthage. He wasn't there more than about 48 hours at the most. So it was really a quick visit. But I think, if I recall correctly, he also had a separate meeting with Bourguiba. I don't recall that meeting. But Bourguiba, who always attached a lot of importance to the U.S. relationship, was pleased that Rockefeller arrived.

From our new residence in Sidi Bou Said I pointed out to Rockefeller the view of the bay. This residence was designed by a Tunisian architect and had been improved upon considerably by my wife as it went up. When we arrived in Tunisia they were just digging the foundation. So for a year and a half we lived in the former Ambassador's residence in Carthage and moved to the new residence half way through our tour. But in the year and a half while it was going up there was a very unimaginative FBO architect who was assigned to oversee the operation. My wife, who has the skills of an interior decorator, added a lot of touches to the original design which I think added a good deal to the villa. It had a magnificent location overlooking the Bay of Tunis. I took Rockefeller and his wife out on the terrace and we could see the small Tunisian navy that had been deployed in front of the President's Palace, which was below us.

The original property for the Ambassador's residence had been given us by President Bourguiba, for which we were immensely appreciative because it was really a unique location. After it was completed the Fourth of July was coming up so we had the annual

reception planned to be held there. I thought it would be nice for Bourguiba to see the new residence on that occasion. Word came back that the President could not establish a precedence by attending our national day because he would have to attend others. But he would come up separately on a separate day and accept our invitation to look at the residence.

Suddenly one day about noon I got a call from the Palace saying the President would be there at 3:00 that afternoon. I called my wife and we received him. Again the terrace was the focal point. It was such a magnificent view looking across the Bay of Tunis. At that point we had only just planted vegetation. At one point the President was standing on the terrace looking at the view with his aide, a man by the name Alouati. I overheard in Arabic the aide saying to the President, “Yes, Mr. President, they can see the Palace from here.” This was true. At that point we could see the tip of the pier in front of the Palace and a little bit of the Palace itself. But of course as the trees grew up one could no longer see the Palace. But I thought that was a kind of cute little comment. In any case, the President came and it was a nice half hour visit.

Q: Well then you came back to Washington from 1976-78. Your position was what?

SEELYE: I think I told you the circumstances of my return in the last interview. I was to return to Washington and become Bill Schaufele's deputy in the African Bureau.

Q: Yes.

SEELYE: I came back in March, 1976. It was not very convenient for my youngest daughter because we had to take her out of school in the middle of the year. And we had to, of course, kick out our tenants who were with the British embassy. I settled into the Bureau of African Affairs and began to learn what my responsibilities were and to learn about Africa. I was a little bit concerned because I came in with a very limited knowledge about Africa. What happened was that I took the place of Ed Mulcahy who was then

assigned to take my place in Tunisia, which was very fortunate for him because he had served there as DCM some years before. So he had the pleasure of serving there twice.

In the course of the next several months, and, in fact, throughout my tour of a year and a half in AF, Bill Schaufele, Assistant Secretary, was frequently in Africa on trips because at this point we were getting very involved in Africa.

Q: This is the 1976-78 period?

SEELYE: Yes, this is March, 1976.

Bill Schaufele would be absent quite frequently so I would often be acting assistant secretary. Early on the Secretary, Henry Kissinger, was planning a trip to Africa. He sort of discovered Africa. Generally speaking Kissinger had very little interest in the third world and what interest he had was keyed to the cold war implications of Third World activities. He never looked at the Third World in terms of the inherent problems, but thought that the problems flowed from the East-West rivalry. What awakened his interest in Africa was the Angola business when the Cuban troops were sent there. He decided that because the Cubans were in league with the Soviets that therefore the Soviets were beginning to penetrate southern Africa—this, of course, includes South Africa. Henry Kissinger had a great fondness for South Africa. So he decided that he should give a little more attention to the southern Africa region which included Rhodesia, which was in a state of flux. There were several movements in Rhodesia which were seeking to establish themselves as a follow-on government to the white Rhodesian government. You also had a problem in Namibia, where there was South African involvement. And so forth. So it was the Secretary's decision that he should spend more time on Africa and he decided to make a trip.

He used to call me up and talk about the trip. I think the first time he called me up to his office was when I was acting assistant secretary in April some time. I said to him, “Mr. Secretary, I am still finding my way around Africa.” He said, “That's all right. I remember

you when I was in the White House." I didn't know quite what he meant. He said, "Yes, you used to give me a hard time." I thought back trying to remember what he meant by that. Later on I concluded that probably what he meant had to do with the civil war in Jordan in 1970. At that time I ran a task force for that operation in the State Department. The White House was advancing the thesis that this was a cold war confrontation and that the Soviets were stirring up the PLO to resist and overthrow King Hussein; that the Soviets were behind the penetration of the Syrian column of tanks into Jordan; and that therefore the Soviets were trying to penetrate an American sphere of influence. In any case, the crisis ended and the White House patted itself on the back for having stood the Soviets down. And this was the line that was given to the press.

Well, correspondents in the aftermath of all this would come over to see me and ask me about this. And without hesitation I said that this was a lot of malarkey. We had intelligence, which we thought was reliable, indicating that there was no evidence indicating that the Soviets (even though they had contacts with the PLO on a continuing basis and had provided some arms and probably mostly money) were behind the PLO uprising in Jordan. The PLO had its own reasons for doing that and their own resources. As for the Syrian invasion into Jordan, we had intelligence indicating that the Soviets had intervened with the Syrian government to try to get it to exercise restraint and not to get involved in the PLO-Jordanian conflict. I described this to the correspondents and suppose it got back to Kissinger. I can only guess that is the reason he made this comment in my presence at this time.

I looked puzzled at the time. He also said, "Yes, you used to treat me with disdain." I thought to myself, "I wonder what he meant by that?" And then thinking about that later, I remembered that at the White House there used to be a Forty Committee. This was created by Kissinger to vet covert operations and in two cases we had worked out a very minor effort to buttress King Hussein. One was to bring in M-16 machine guns which were the latest. We wanted to do it in a sub rosa fashion. I can't remember what the other operation was, but it wasn't overthrowing anybody, just some kind of operation we

didn't want to be known. So I was the person who went over to argue the case before the Committee. And then during the Jordan crisis occasionally there would be a meeting of the WASAG (Washington Special Action Group) which was attended by Alexis Johnson from the State Department. Also attending were Helms from CIA, Packard, Deputy Defense Secretary, and also the head of the JCS at that point, Admiral Moorer. I often went over with Alexis Johnson and sat behind him and occasionally was asked for some data, information. Those were the only times that I had any contact with Kissinger, so he must have been referring to his perception of me in those meetings. So when he said, “I remember you, you treated me with disdain,” I said, “Mr. Secretary, I don't ever remember treating you with disdain.” And then he said, quite surprisingly, “I admired you for it.” So he admired me for something that I didn't know I had done. So for some silly reason he had, I guess, a love/hate feeling towards me.

The Secretary went on the trip to Africa and Bill Schaufele went with him. At that point, of course, Kissinger was riding high. He was Secretary of State as well as controlling the National Security Council in the White House. So he had a lot of power. One time in early June, Bill Schaufele was back and he often took me up with him when the Secretary called him to his office. As you know the Secretary had quite a temper. He would throw temper tantrums many times a day, as you no doubt know. I remember once he threw a temper tantrum with us and he had the custom of holding a pencil in his mouth...not laterally but vertically. He threw the pencil at us and said, “Get out.” So we got out. Ten minutes later his aide called and said the Secretary wanted to see us. He had calmed down.

One time when we were up there Bill Schaufele told him that Governor Scranton, who had just been appointed as the USUN representative had just decided to make his initial trip to Africa and was taking a White House plane. The Secretary, who of course was paranoid, pricked up his ears and said, “What? We can't let him do that.” As I recall, Bill Schaufele said, “Well, Mr. Secretary, the White House has given him the plane and authorized him to go.” So the Secretary said, “We must send somebody along to keep an eye on him.” At that point they both looked at me. I think this was about a week before Scranton was to go.

They said, “You are it. You are to go along.” So I was put in the position of being assigned to go along on the trip as more or less Kissinger's spy.

Of course, Scranton had to be informed and every post had to be informed, because everything had been laid on in accordance with the number of people in the party, their rank, etc. Suddenly they throw in this hooker, Seelye is going along. So I arrived at the Kennedy airport where we all met and I know everybody wondered who the hell was this guy that Kissinger had sent. It was not an easy position for me to be in. But Bill Scranton is such a wonderful person that the coolness quickly evaporated and I accompanied him to several Western African countries, Liberia, Senegal, Gabon and one other.

We had been going for about a week when one morning in Gabon (Libreville) I was awakened in my hotel room at 5:00 in the morning. I remember the sun was just coming up, when there was a knock on the door. It was the duty officer from the American embassy in Libreville. He said, “We have a NIACT from the Department.” It was slugged “from Eagleburger for Seelye.” Just the day before we had heard about the assassination of our Ambassador, Frank Meloy, in Beirut. The cable said, “You probably have heard that Frank Meloy has been assassinated in Beirut and the Secretary has decided that you shall undertake a mission to Beirut and take his place on a temporary basis. We have reserved a seat on a flight leaving Libreville tonight to return to Washington via Paris. You are to take that flight.” So all I could say was “Jesus Christ.”

I waited two or three hours and then went up to the residence where Scranton was having breakfast with Andy Steigman, our ambassador. I handed him the cable and he said, “Sit down and have a cup of coffee.” After Scranton read the cable he came over and puts his arm around my shoulder and didn't say anything.

The Scranton party took off in about two hours for their next stop, somewhere in Central Africa. But in the rush of affairs, I had forgotten to retrieve my passport which was being held by the Air Force escort officer. So the plane took off with my diplomatic passport. But

that was no problem since the embassy fixed me up with a regular passport, and back to the U.S. I went.

I arrived back in Washington, got home, dumped my bags and went down to the Department. It was about 5:30 or 6:00 in the evening. There was a duty officer in AF who had obviously been given a cover story because he didn't know why I was back. To my question about the whereabouts of the Secretary, he said, “Well, he is out at Andrews Air Force Base to meet the body of Ambassador Meloy.” So I sent word up to his staff that I was in AF and that when the Secretary returned I was ready to see him. He got back in about an hour and I went up to meet with him. I made two points to him but can't remember what one of them was. The most important point was that my understanding was that the PLO was the force providing security in West Beirut since the Lebanese military had fallen apart and their security forces were nonexistent. West Beirut east of the green line is where all the embassies were located, as well as all government ministries except for the Presidency. And, of course, Meloy was killed while about to cross that green line. So I said that I felt in order to perform my duties, which was to re-establish contact with the Lebanese government, I needed to have effective security. This could only be provided by the PLO and therefore I asked for authority to deal with the PLO.

The Secretary hesitated and hesitated and said, “Well, I will tell you what we will do. I will authorize your security officer to deal with his counterpart in the PLO with regard to your security. But there will be no political discussions, nothing at your level.” I said, “Okay.”

I came in the next day and started reading cables. In reading the cables I saw a cable which had been sent out to Frank Meloy a few days before his assassination. Apparently at that point 30 days had elapsed since Frank Meloy had arrived and normally diplomatic protocol forbids you to deal with any government officials until you have presented your credentials to the chief of state. Meloy was waiting for an opportunity to do just that, but in order to do that he had to cross the green line to present his credentials to the President. He was waiting for the crossing to be safe. The crossing was risky, fighting was going

on on the west side and also along the border line. The cable from the Department that went out said in effect, “We appreciate the fact that you have to be very careful about your security, but we hope that as soon as possible you will cross over and present your credentials because the fact that you do not have relations with key government officials is inhibiting things and making it difficult for us to have a relationship.” That was the essence of the cable. To me that was the cable that triggered the death of Frank Meloy.

Q: I have heard stories that Larry Eagleburger was behind that. I don't know.

SEELYE: So, Meloy, as we know, took with him the economic officer, Waring.

That Sunday morning after I read the cables I was up in Larry Eagleburger's office and they were trying to decide who they would send with me. The embassy was in kind of bad straits in terms of morale. It didn't have strong leadership apparently. There was no very senior officer there. They felt the need to jack it up as well as to undertake this political mission. Larry Eagleburger had with him the head of security whom I had known and who said, “Well, what about Ray Hunt?” I said, “That's a great idea.” I knew him slightly and thought very highly of him. So they called in Ray Hunt—poor Ray Hunt—and said, “Ray, how about going along with Seelye to Beirut?” Ray looked shocked. He said, “Well, let me think about it.” He already had a mission doing something, going on a Presidential trip or something. He said, “Well, I will have to cancel all this.” “Never mind, this is more important,” said Eagleburger.

That is how it was that Ray came along. We didn't really have much choice. Although some people said later on that we could have had a choice, but I never thought I had a choice.

Then, another person was brought in. My security officer from Tunisia, Robbie Robinson just happened to have come back by ship. They said, “We have to send two security officers, how about sending him along.” I said, “Fine.” So Robinson also came along. They

also added as the second security officer to accompany me, McCarthy, who was then with Nancy Kissinger.

So we were planning the trip. The next question was how to get me into Beirut because the airport had been closed for five or six months. I heard from the grapevine that CIA was being consulted on ways to get me in surreptitiously. All kinds of hair-raising ideas were being offered. Then Henry Kissinger said, “Well, I am meeting with my chiefs of mission in Paris on Wednesday. You come to Paris, I want you to be there. Then position yourself in Paris until we can get you into Beirut.

So, everything was done in a hurry. I think it was Monday that we took off, I can't remember, the two security officers and I and Ray Hunt. In the rush of affairs we arrived at Dulles airport and I had left my air tickets on my bureau in my bedroom. Well, that didn't cause me any problems as we were flying TWA and the security people said they would take care of it. We arrived in Paris and the funny thing was that Kissinger was so security conscious, as he still is, that every chief of mission from the Arab world assigned to that Paris meeting was assigned a security car with a French policeman while in Paris. This meant me too. It was ridiculous. Here I was with these two security officers plus one or two French cars.

We met with Kissinger in the secure “tank” in the embassy. I will never forget that meeting because attending were Hermann Eilts from Egypt, Bill Porter from Saudi Arabia, Pickering from Jordan, and Murphy from Syria, etc. The meeting had hardly started when Hermann Eilts, of all people, said to the Secretary, “When are we going to recognize the PLO?” Well, that stunned me because Hermann, who is a brilliant Foreign Service officer, outstanding, is also cautious and careful. He was the last person I would have thought at a meeting like this would have said that. Well, that provided the opening. I jumped in and said, “Now that is a good point. I am going to Beirut and the PLO is operating there.” So the whole meeting started off on the PLO and the Secretary was kind of put off by this offensive. He made some comment, “Never have I been pressed so much on the PLO in my life.”

Of course, the Secretary had made a commitment to the Israelis during the disengagement talks of 1973 and 1974, that the U.S. would neither recognize nor negotiate with the PLO. But he always claimed that he had not precluded a dialogue—that the intention of that undertaking was to leave a loophole for dialogue. This loophole, however, was closed by successive administrations either inadvertently or advertently...Carter and Reagan.

We had that meeting with our Middle East ambassadors. Before I left Washington I had said that while in Beirut it would be useful to have somebody over on the East side representing me since obviously it would be inadvisable for me to try to cross the green line in view of what happened to my predecessor. The President was located in East Beirut, where things were safe, and also located there were Maronite leaders and leaders of parties I ought to be in touch with. So somebody said, “What about Ed Djerejian?” who at that point was consul somewhere in southern France. So Ed came up to Paris and we talked together. I said to Kissinger in the “tank,” “I have a proposal that Ed be located over there and that we have a walkie-talkie scrambler so I can talk to him without being overheard.” Kissinger thought it was a great idea. However, Djerejian never came because at the last minute his wife, with whom he had been married for only a short time, threw a fit and said that she wouldn't let him go, it was too dangerous—although East Beirut was a lot safer than West Beirut. So that never worked out.

We had been in Paris for two or three days when suddenly word came that the airport in Beirut had miraculously opened up after five or six months of being shut tight. I was told to fly immediately to Athens and get ready to fly to Beirut, which I did. But the news came in about 11:00 at night and the security officer in Paris said they had to give me a pseudonym. He proposed Cohen, or something like that. I said, “I don't think that would be an appropriate pseudonym in that part of the world. Let's think of another one.” So he thought of another one. I was also given a flak jacket with bullet proof vest and a London Fog bullet proof raincoat. Of course it never rains in Beirut in June. I tried on the flak jacket

in my Paris hotel room and found that there was only one suit jacket I could put over it without looking too bulky.

So there were four flak jackets given to us and the party turned out to be, me, Ray Hunt, the two security officers and some young communications guy. There were five of us but only four flak jackets and one London Fog raincoat. The raincoat was given to the communications guy who was about 5'2" talk so it came down to his ankles. We got to Athens and shortly thereafter the first plane left Beirut airport and arrived in Athens. So we were at the airport to take it back to Beirut. Nat Howell came off and some others, breathing heavy sighs of relief. We, somewhat apprehensively got on the plane with our pseudonyms. We were in first class. The flight attendants were all smiles. They wanted to know our names and I gave them my pseudonym. They smiled in a way leading me to believe they knew exactly who we were and that we weren't fooling anybody. There were very few passengers on the plane, needless to say.

We flew in over Beirut very low and landed at the airport. My security people, who were overly security conscientious, told me to be the last one off. Then they gave me the signal and as I emerged from the door of the plane, there at the top of the steps was a nattily dressed military type who turned out to be a PLO major who greeted me and escorted me to my car. It was the ambassador's armored car. The ambassador's chauffeur was also killed in that crossing and I will mention more about that later. His successor was sitting on the seat like this, crouched way down with just his head showing above the window.

Oh, one thing I might mention. Before I left Washington I was invited to President Ford's office because I was supposed to be a Presidential emissary for some reason or other. We were talking about my mission and he said, "Is there anything that we can do for you?" And I said, "Yes, I understand that the morale at the embassy is understandably low and it would be nice if we had some new Hollywood films." So he turned to Brent Scowcroft and said, "Let's do that." So a footlocker of films had been produced and were on the plane with us. But it took longer to get that footlocker off. So I was sitting in that

car waiting for that footlocker of films to be off loaded and we could hear shells in the distance and shooting not too far away. The driver was slumped down in his seat with a PLO major sitting to his right and my security officers were sitting with me and Ray Hunt was in the car behind me. I began to wonder if it was worth waiting for those films. Finally they managed to extricate the footlocker and off we went.

In front of us was a pickup truck full of PLO soldiers and another PLO pickup truck in back of our little convoy as we started out to the embassy. We took a bypass around Beirut. Once we went by artillery pieces firing away at some target. Anyway, we got to the embassy safely. The next morning Ray Hunt immediately began to focus in on management and administrative problems and rearranged offices so that my office was not so high up and vulnerable but lower down in the building.

The next day the PLO set up mortars right next to the embassy. Now from the embassy we could see Junieh across the Bay of Beirut. Junieh was the headquarters of the Lebanese Forces, the Maronite militia. The fighting going on was pretty much between them and militia elements on the West side composed of PLO, leftist Moslem groups, etc. This was the nature of the confrontation at that point. The PLO started firing mortar rounds toward Junieh. We could see the smoke where the rounds dropped. And then Junieh started firing back. Fortunately the returned shells didn't hit the embassy but several landed on the AUB campus, fortunately with limited damage. To this day I don't know if they purposefully avoided the embassy or if they just didn't target very well, but we were spared. Clearly the PLO did that as a kind of provocation.

The afternoon of the next day we heard that the next MEA plane that came in had been hit by a shell from Junieh and the co-pilot had been killed and the plane damaged. The airport was shut again for another four or five months. So I had gotten in in a two-day opening. I have no idea why that window of two days developed, whether it was to let me in.

I obviously was not going to be bound by any protocol regarding presenting credentials and started my round of calls on Lebanese officials. Every time I was about to make a call my security people would go out and with the PLO plot the route of my approach and reconnoiter. And so that was what we did. I did this for a couple of weeks and began to think this was kind of senseless. Fighting was going on and you could tell when you left the embassy when it was dangerous and when it wasn't. There was kind of an innate sense that people had if there was danger or not. Sometimes you would leave the embassy and along the Corniche you would see peddlers moving around. Other times there would be nobody on the streets, just totally empty and you knew that there was a rumor that fighting was about to erupt in that area.

But we went out anyway. One time we were calling on Kamal Jumblatt, who was a leading figure in the Socialist Party, head of the Druze, I could hear shells coming closer as we came out. Our security people said, “Come on let's get into the car and get the hell out of here.” So we did and on the way one of our cars stalled, not my car, and we all stopped. Somebody appeared from nowhere, he used to work for the embassy, and said he would get a battery. So we left that car and went on. I said to the security people, “If it was getting dangerous, why didn't you come in and interrupt my meeting?” They had also said they had seen cars from one of the Palestinian radical groups circling the building I was in. They said they thought the meeting was important. I said, “No meeting is that important if you have threats from these groups.”

Well, those were the kinds of conditions we were operating in. I realized that was no way to conduct diplomacy and it really wasn't very feasible to continue on in that fashion for very long.

Meanwhile we looked into what had happened to Meloy. Several things were quite significant in my mind. One was that the arrangement for the meeting with the President, let's say for 10:00 in the morning, had been made over the telephone, so it was known to those who were listening to our phones. Secondly, the embassy took a long time,

longer than it should have, in checking back to see if the Ambassador had arrived at his destination. Let's say he was due to arrive at 10:00, it wasn't until maybe 11:00 or later that the embassy called, or maybe the Palace called asking where the Ambassador was. So crucial time passed which could have been utilized to save his life.

Then, after the party left the embassy, maybe an hour later, but after obviously the Ambassador had been taken, a call was received by the wife of the chauffeur. The chauffeur had been a terrific chauffeur, he had risked his life on many occasions during the civil war and had been very loyal to the American embassy. A call had been received by his wife saying, “We have so-and-so, but don't worry, he will be all right.”

Thirdly, the Ambassadors' cars in those days were rigged with a concealed microphone in the ceiling. You had a button to the right of your seat that you could press if you were in a dangerous situation. That would trigger the microphone and then the microphone would play back to the Marine Guard office. So the embassy could hear what was going on and take steps accordingly. That button had never been pressed in the case of Meloy. Nothing was heard at the Marine headquarters. Either it hadn't worked or it hadn't been pressed. My guess is that it had not been pressed, because my reading is that probably what happened was that the chauffeur had been blackmailed into agreeing to a friendly kidnapping. [This is just my view.] That is, the car would be stopped and the party would be kidnapped for political purposes, with no intention of killing them. They would be held and then all released. The kidnappers wanted to make a political point. Presumably the chauffeur had been put under such terrible pressure, maybe with threats to the life of his wife and family, that he figured that since no one was going to get killed he would go along with it. Further substantiation of this is the fact that as the party was approaching the green line, the chauffeur, on his radio mike, told the backup car to turn around and go back because he said it wasn't needed anymore. The Ambassador obviously had not known about this exchange because it was in Arabic. Frank didn't speak Arabic, didn't

know what the chauffeur was saying and probably didn't notice that the backup car had turned around. This substantiates my thesis.

Evidently the party arrived at a prearranged area where guys with guns stopped the car. The driver presumably says, “Mr. Ambassador don't worry about this, these are friendly parties,” and opens up the window and the guns were poked in. And the group is taken. The driver probably told the Ambassador that this was a friendly group, so he did not press the button.

We learned later that the group that had taken the Ambassador, Waring and the chauffeur somehow turned them over or they were grabbed by a communist group, another group. Circumstances are unclear regarding the transfer. But they were evidently moved and killed immediately and put into body bags and within a matter of a couple of hours after the scheduled meeting their bodies were found on the Corniche.

The PLO was informed of the action because it was in charge of security. But it was quite upset because of tardiness in informing the PLO. They said, “Look, if you had notified us sooner we probably could have tracked down the kidnappers right away and saved the lives of the party.” Which very likely could have been the case. That to me is the only explanation of how this could have happened.

Later on we found the Ambassador's vehicle in an abandoned garage intact. I had the unpleasant task of presenting a plaque to the driver's widow and two sons on the occasion of his death.

Q: Just to give a little feel, what was this all about? Why was one group trying to kill the Ambassador?

SEELYE: Well, you start out with the stigma attached to the close U.S.-Israeli relationship. That is the underlying consideration. Radical groups equate the U.S. with Israel, which had been beating up Palestinians and taken Palestinian land, etc. More than that, with regard

to the Lebanese political dynamics, Muslim radicals alleged U.S. support for the Christian Maronite faction. Officially the U.S. did not support the Maronite faction. We were neutral. In fact, while I was in Beirut I frequently made public statements and interviews saying that we were neutral, wanted a reunited Lebanon and believed in preserving Lebanon's territorial integrity. And, in fact, we were very skeptical of the Maronites because they were causing a lot of problems. They helped stimulate the start of the civil war. So there was no truth in fact for their belief that we supported them on the political level. On the other hand, I have learned since then that the CIA was probably feeding them some stuff. Certainly they were later, whether they were at that time I don't know. I should have known if they were at that time. Be that as it may, the radical faction no doubt assumed that this was what we were doing, that we were helping the Maronites with equipment and money because they were well-heeled.

Those were two basic reasons. A third, of course, was that the communists obviously got Soviet money and the Soviets were anti-American, so they shared the anti-American orientation of the Soviets. They were the ones who killed Meloy. Those who had kidnapped Meloy had not intended to kill. That is my theory...they just wanted to make a political point. So the killers were those with a Soviet connection. So this is a third element.

Q: Well, now, you arrived in Beirut. Obviously it is dangerous, there is a war going on and our embassy is in the line of fire. Something that I have wondered about for a long time, what were we doing there? Common sense would say, “Okay, let's get out of here and go to Cyprus. If you want to talk to us you can come to Cyprus,” or something of that nature.

SEELYE: Well, eventually, I felt very much that way and cut the embassy down to a hard core. But the reason we kept even the hard core, in my view, was because it would have been terribly demoralizing to our friends in Lebanon had we pulled out entirely. Keep in mind the Lebanese had attached tremendous importance to U.S. relations. In fact, greater importance than they probably should have. I don't know if you have served in Lebanon, but whenever there were elections there, each party would go to the American embassy to

get support because they assumed that we could wave a wand and get anybody elected. This was, of course, not true, but they just assumed the United States was there to help them. If we had pulled out it would have been extraordinarily demoralizing to them. And it would have led to other friendly Western embassies pulling out. It would have led to a chain reaction and psychologically I think we felt it would have been disastrous. So that is the reason I think we stayed on.

Q: You said chain reaction, what would the end result of the chain reaction be and why would it be a problem?

SEELYE: Well, I think people would have felt that they had been abandoned by the West and lost hope. It might have caused who knows what kind of reaction. In any case, we could afford to have a small attachment there. In addition to overall PLO security, remnants of one of the Lebanese military factions guarded the embassy. Also the AUB was still there. Here was the American University of Beirut next door to us. The AUB faculty was still there. They would have been very distraught had the United States pulled out its embassy. In fact, an amusing thing happened while I was there. We ran low on mazut, which was the term for kerosene, and all our heating ran on mazut. The PLO had control of the resources. The AUB hospital told the PLO at one point that it was running out of mazut and therefore couldn't treat PLO fighters any more. So the PLO said, “Don't worry we will give you mazut for the hospital and the AUB campus will function.” So we connected our lines up with the AUB lines and in effect the PLO was providing us with mazut.

Q: Well, it just seems that we found ourselves hostage to forces even, you might say, the friendly ones. It was a Middle East squabble that within the context of American interests it seems we could pull out and say, “Look, you people settle your own problems, we are not going to put our own people in danger.”

SEELYE: I would have agreed if it hadn't been a country with such a close relationship with the U.S., including the presence of the American University of Beirut.

Q: How did you conduct your business?

SEELYE: Well, the PLO would come by in their pickup trucks with armed PLO fighters to escort me to calls on the foreign minister, or prime minister, or whomever. We would exchange views which I would report back to Washington. But I realized that this was not that important and really wasn't worth my risking my life and the life of my security people. As long as our people were hemmed up in the embassy, I felt that it wasn't quite so bad because I had never thought at that point that anybody was going to attack the embassy. Certainly the people in the East, the Maronites, weren't going to, and the PLO had a mandate to protect us and wouldn't attack us. So there wasn't any concern on my part that the embassy, itself, would be attacked. Although one day, I know after I left, I was told that a bullet had been found in the bed in which I had been sleeping. It had come in through a window and ricocheted or something. Maybe it was inadvisable to keep our people there, I don't know. At the time we thought it was advisable.

So, I traveled around and I slept in the embassy. Some of the embassy staff lived in houses outside.

Q: You were sort of holed up in the embassy. This was before the time that a lot of hostages were being taken. How were we viewing at that time the outcome of the civil war? It sounds like nobody was going to get the upper hand and a lot of people were going to get killed.

SEELYE: One thing I didn't mention was that there was a belief on the part of some Lebanese, and I don't mean to say Lebanese who were friendly to the United States, that our policy basically was to Balkanize Lebanon. There would be a Maronite area, a Shiite area, etc. I was constantly trying to refute this notion. Raymond Edde, a Maronite leader

who had good relations with the Moslems, felt that way. He claimed that he had been told that by Kissinger. I denied it. Our official policy was to keep Lebanon intact. We were urging the parties to get together but we had no capability of getting them together. We would make public statements assuring everybody we believed in their getting together and wanting them to get together, but policy is limited by capability. There really wasn't anything specific we could do at that point beyond hoping that the war would begin to ease off. And, of course, none of us...that was 1976...thought it was going to last another 16 years.

Q: I assume you had both military and CIA at your embassy. Were they giving you any prognosis?

SEELYE: They were prisoners of their lousy reports. The trouble with DIA and CIA, particularly with CIA, is, as you know, they pay for their information. Therefore there tends to be an assumption that if you pay for information it is more accurate than information that isn't paid for.

Q: Which is a horrendous leap of faith.

SEELYE: Oh, terrible. Let me give you a specific example. At one point the station chief and the military attach# came to me and said, “We have to evacuate because the Maronite militia are about to launch an attack on West Beirut and we will be right in the line of fire.” I said, “What makes you think that?” They said, “Look at all these reports.” I said, “Well, you look at them. Read them again. What they say is that this is what the militia leaders say they are going to do, but that doesn't mean they are going to do it or be able to do it, because the Syrians are right on the outskirts of Beirut and they aren't going to allow these guys to do it. And they know the Syrians are there and therefore they aren't going to try it. They are just shooting off their mouths.” So they pulled back and about ten years later I happened to bump into the CIA station chief and he said, “You were right.” Well, I was right only because of common sense. They were believing their reports. So there was

no prognosis that the CIA or DIA could provide me that I didn't have a better feel for. But nobody could provide a prognosis as to when the civil war was going to end.

Q: How did you and members of your embassy tend to look upon this whole thing in Lebanon? What were we doing; how did we hope it would work out; etc.?

SEELYE: Unfortunately, I had a very weak political staff at that point. Nat Howell had left and there were a couple of young officers who were new and there wasn't much I could tap there. Ray Hunt was an administrative type so I was pretty much on my own. But I concluded and sent in a cable to this effect, that until the Arab-Israeli problem was solved, the Lebanese problem would continue to fester. You had all the Palestinians there and the Maronite and Palestinian confrontation which was very serious. The Maronites were so resentful of the large Palestinian element that Lebanon couldn't be put back together until we made progress on the Arab-Israeli problem. Well, I heard later that that caused a big rumpus back in Washington. The White House—by that time at the NSC it was not Scowcroft but the Russian expert—saw the cable and called Kissinger's attention to it. Kissinger was very upset for some reason or other that that kind of an analysis should be made, I am told by people back in NEA, and blew his stack that Seelye should be making that kind of analysis. Well, that is what we are paid to do, to make analyses like that. But that is not what Washington wanted to believe. They wanted to believe that somehow you could solve it without relevance to anything else.

But that certainly was my conclusion then, that it was going to rather along—until we made progress on the Arab-Israeli problem.

Q: How about the role of Syria?

SEELYE: At that point the Syrians were very restrained. They were too restrained, in my view, because one of the worst massacres occurred while I was there, the massacre of Tall Za'tar. Tall Za'tar was the main refugee camp then that was a focal point for the Palestinian resistance movement. The Maronite militia decided to take it on. The Syrians,

who came into Lebanon to prevent the Maronites from being eclipsed and defeated by their opponents—Syria's objective was to maintain balance between the factions—were at that point in league with the Maronite militia. They had for the moment abandoned their former friends, the communists, Moslem nationalists and socialists, in order to help the Maronites. And the Maronites knew that so they began to plaster Tall Za'tar with bombs and shells. On the radio I listened to these plaintive calls from Tall Za'tar, “Help us, help us, we are besieged and beleaguered.” Finally, the Tall Za'tar leader said, “Okay, we give up,” and the Palestinians walked out with white flags and were mowed down by the Maronites. Hundreds and hundreds were killed. And the Syrians, of course, had blood on their hands because they did not intervene. So at that point they were around Beirut but not in Beirut.

Q: Did you have contact with them?

SEELYE: None whatsoever. In fact, at one point, there was a suggestion that I meet with the famous Shiite leader who disappeared in Libya, Imam Sadr, who was a rising star among the Shiites. As you know, the Shiites were the depressed people of Lebanon. They were beginning to assert themselves. I heard at that point that Imam Sadr was very close to the Syrians, indeed even perhaps a Syrian agent. I said, “No, I don't want to do that because it might look as if I am consorting with a Syrian agent.” I think I made a mistake, I probably should have met him, but I didn't. At that point I was extremely sensitive about involving myself with a Syrian connection. But we didn't foresee the future Syrian involvement in Beirut.

Q: What was it that caused the Syrians to be able to maintain a civil war for 16 years and to be so brutal?

SEELYE: Well the Syrians didn't maintain it. They obviously facilitated it, but it was an indigenous war.

Q: Well, what was it that kept on this very brutal fighting?

SEELYE: Well, the Syrians didn't keep the fighting going.

Q: Not the Syrians, the Lebanese.

SEELYE: Well, I can't answer that question because I never would have thought that the civilized Lebanese could ever have lowered themselves to such bestiality and brutalities as occurred. It is absolutely unbelievable and to me still inexplicable. It got so bad that Muslims would stop any car with Christians and shoot them and vice versa, right there on the spot. It was awful. It became absolutely terrible. And I cannot explain it. I can explain why Lebanon broke into a civil war, there are a lot of reasons for that. The fact that you had these feudal politicians who were running the show and the poor people in the south who had nothing. The big gap between rich and poor. The Palestinian incursion that threatened the dominating Maronites. All those things contributed to the starting of the civil war, but I cannot explain how it became so brutal. It was just beyond belief.

The Syrians believed in maintaining a balance of power in Lebanon that enabled them to dominate. They played factions off against the other, but that didn't mean they wanted the fighting to continue. It was much easier for them for the situation to be peaceful. So the Syrians did not want the civil war to continue. Also they didn't want any one faction to win.

Q: At the time you were there, who was contributing...after all when you fire off mortars, mortars are expensive...where was the money coming from?

SEELYE: Well, the PLO was getting most of its funding from Saudi Arabia.

Q: And where were they getting their supplies?

SEELYE: The Soviet Union, the Eastern Bloc. The Saudis were providing a lot of money. The Kuwaitis to a certain extent. Also, the Palestinians working in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait had two percent of their salaries deducted, which went to the PLO cause.

Q: And where were the Maronites getting their equipment, etc.?

SEELYE: Well, they were getting money from wealthy Lebanese who had fled to Europe and probably from some French sources. They had a close relationship with France. Later on they were getting weapons from Israel. About the time I was there Israel apparently started providing American weapons.

Q: What sort of things were you getting from the desk. You sent back cables saying that this was something that was going to be solved unless the Arab-Israeli situation was solved.

SEELYE: I was talking every day with Maury Draper via radio telephone. I was sending cables back for general distribution, but talking every day with the desk. I was only there about five and a half weeks. I might say that before I left for Beirut, Kissinger said, “If you want to be ambassador, I will make you ambassador there.” I said, “Well, let me go over there and take a look.” And after two weeks there I decided I didn't want to be Ambassador to Lebanon so I sent a cable back saying, “Thanks very much, I don't want to be Ambassador to Lebanon.” But that just showed you the power that Kissinger had. He could say that you could be ambassador if you wanted it.

Q: You came back when?

SEELYE: I went in in mid-June and must have come back in early August. I was there about six weeks. I said, “Look, we should cut down the embassy, I'll pull out, have no senior officer here, pull in our tentacles.” There had been an evacuation before that, so we negotiated a second evacuation, offering it to non-embassy Americans in Beirut as well. At first we thought we would fly out if we could get the Christian militia to hold fire for a day.

I called a contact on the Maronite side and said, “Could you check with all the militia and see if they wouldn't agree for half a day to lay off so that we could evacuate Americans?” After a day or so he called back and said, “I have assurances from all except one group that is on the hills above the airport. I can't get their assurances.” So I told Washington that we couldn't evacuate by air and I would look into evacuating by land.

It was considered too dangerous to go on the main road to Damascus, but there was a circuitous route to the south. My intermediary with Arafat was the Egyptian Ambassador. So I asked him to contact Arafat and see if he could provide us with some security for a column to go south of Beirut and out. Word came back that we could do this. So we got all ready and notified Americans to be ready at various collection points. The night before, Arafat sent word that he couldn't guarantee security after all, it was too dangerous. I didn't know at that point if that was a political ploy by Arafat just to stick the knife in, or whether it was truly a security problem. Two years ago when I was in Tunis with a group I went to see him and asked him specifically that question, “When you backed off on your undertaking to escort our convoy, was that for political reasons or for security reasons?” He said, “Security reasons, we had information that made it difficult for us to assure that we could protect you.”

I then notified Washington that we couldn't go out by land. Kissinger sent a rocket as was his custom saying in effect, “In that case, we are going to send in the Sixth Fleet and evacuate that way, to hell with the PLO. You just tell them that we are coming in with landing craft.” I thought that we couldn't operate this way in this environment. Tell the PLO we are coming in? That is a threat and we need the PLO to help us to evacuate. We couldn't evacuate under dangerous conditions. So I deliberated and decided to do it my way, figuring I was risking something because if it hadn't worked out my way I would have had to tell Kissinger that the PLO refused to help—and he hadn't asked me to check with the PLO.

I said to the Egyptian Ambassador, “Look, we have to get out by sea. I wonder if you could get Arafat to agree to help us evacuate. He has been very helpful in providing my security. All we need to do is secure an evacuation point by the sea and just help us. Would he be kind enough to do that?” That was in late morning and I had several hours of apprehension waiting for the response. I thought, well, if word came back “no,” what was I going to do? We wanted to get the people out, but we couldn't bring in the Sixth Fleet without PLO help. I would have had to go back and say, “No, the Sixth Fleet can't come in this way.” Anyway, as it turned out the Egyptian Ambassador called back later in the afternoon and said, “Yes, the PLO will help.” I didn't tell Washington how I handled it, I just told them to let me know what their timing was and we would be set.

So a couple of days later Washington notified us that landing craft were coming in, so we had people collected to evacuate. And to this day, Kissinger and others don't know—I guess Maury Draper knows because I told him—that we didn't do it the way Kissinger had asked us to do it, which was to just tell them they have to comply. So we evacuated, including myself. We took the landing craft and the security people were so security conscious that they forced me to go below. The craft took us to another ship which was like a mother ship that opened up and the landing craft just floated in. Then they sent helicopters and we flew to the aircraft carrier where we had lunch with the commanding officer. After lunch we were put into a little plane and catapulted off the deck, which is quite an experience because you are facing backward and a guy comes to you and says, “Attach your harness” and it is like, “boom” and suddenly there you are 300 feet away from the aircraft carrier. It is an incredible experience. We flew to Athens.

Meanwhile the Commander of the Sixth Fleet, Fred Turner, whom I had known when I was in Tunisia said, “Why don't you come with me, I will escort you back?” I said, “No, that takes too long, but thank you very much,” and flew back directly.

Lebanese were not very happy at our pulling out. It was kind of demoralizing to have a second embassy evacuation although the embassy remained with a small staff.

Q: When you got back to Washington, what was the feeling you got?

SEELYE: When I got back to Washington I had, of course, to report to Kissinger. I got a feeling that people weren't overjoyed about developments. I got the feeling that Kissinger was mad at me, maybe because of that cable I had sent.

Oh, another thing I did. At one point I cabled asking permission to make a statement because there was a lot of misunderstanding about what our policy was at that point. The atmosphere was charged and I thought a statement made in a certain way would be helpful. Washington cabled back and authorized me to make it, but apparently it did so without checking with Kissinger. He had a passionate obsession of not allowing ambassadors to ever express themselves publicly, even in an official position. It was just his paranoia. I heard later that he thought I had done this on my own. So I had two strikes against me when I went back.

Finally after a couple of days after my return from Beirut Kissinger received me. Of course, he was all sweetness and light. He is the most duplicitous official that ever lived. He was probably damning me to others and to my face he kept saying what a great job I had done, etc. And then I went back to my AF duties.

I don't think it ever affected my relations with Kissinger because I saw him after that. I remember one time he called me at home when Bill Schaufele was away on a trip, Sunday morning about 8:00 and said, “Have you seen the latest cables from Angola [or something]?” I said, “Oh, Mr. Secretary, I am still at home.” “Well, we have to get some responses out right away.” Anyway I went down to the Department and brought people in and we drafted cables. I called him at home about 3:00 or 4:00 that afternoon to tell him we were all set. Then he began to reminisce, he said, “Well, I will get you out to the Middle

East in another six months." So, I guess he got over these things. That was the end of my Lebanese connection.

Q: Back to the Africa things, what did you find your main tasks were? You kept it up until 1978, didn't you?

SEELYE: Well, yes, I kept it up. Bill Schaufele was really an old African hand and knew what he was doing. I was learning and was just kind of his alter ego. I don't know that I was assigned any special tasks. I fit in wherever I could.

When he was gone I had to testify on the Hill. Once I remember having to testify on the Hill on our aid package for Africa. In those days we had an aid package, economic and military. The subcommittee was headed by Congressman Diggs, who was an African American who was very interested in Africa. I made my canned presentation. What you do is submit something in writing and then you kind of summarize it. I noticed up on the dais there was an empty space with a marker "Congressman Stephen Solarz." I didn't think much about it. After about half an hour into the testimony, Solarz appeared, very jaunty and kind of self-important. He sat down and immediately asked me a question. Somehow Solarz's deportment put me off and what put me off even more was that I had answered that question previously in my testimony, so I found myself saying, I don't know why, to Solarz, "Well, Congressman Solarz, if you had been here on time you would have heard the answer to your question. I have already given the answer." I then turned to Diggs and said, "Mr. Chairman, would you like me to repeat for the benefit of Congressman Solarz what I said earlier?" He said, "Yes, please do." Well, Congressman Solarz never forgot that and I will tell you a story about that later on.

Then what happened was—I mentioned earlier that Kissinger was zeroing in on Africa—that after Kissinger came back from Africa he started calling a daily meeting in his office every day at 10:00, called the African group meeting, which no other geographical bureau, to my knowledge, enjoyed. Every day we would see the Secretary at the same time. This,

of course, was terribly useful because we could use that meeting to get his approval for things we wanted done. And at that meeting he would call in—he always liked to have a big group—Phil Habib, who was Under Secretary for Political Affairs; Robinson, his deputy, when he was around; Winston Lord, who was sort of his political counselor; John Reinhardt from USIA; and Bill Schaufele and me; and his notetaker from the White House, Peter Rodman. That was the Africa group which met every morning at 10:00 sometimes for ten minutes and sometimes for twenty. We met for several months like that. It was unbelievable. According to Peter Rodman at one point he was working on a third book by Kissinger but it was never finished. This book would have touched on this period of the African group meetings.

Then the Republicans lost the election.

Q: This was the election of November, 1976.

SEELYE: That's right. I might add parenthetically that Kissinger still used to needle me, even though I was in African Affairs, about my alleged PLO connection. Oh, yeah, I skipped something. When I was in Paris, waiting to go to Beirut, Kissinger took me aside at one point and said, “Now, I have given you permission to have your security officer deal with the PLO. This is to be secret.” As if this could be kept secret. “If this gets out I will have to repudiate you.” This is vintage Kissinger. He never stood up for subordinates, as we know. So Kissinger used to needle me about the PLO from time to time. I remember one time I escorted the South African Ambassador into his office. The South African Ambassador was his favorite so Kissinger allowed him to take the private elevator which was also used by Dobrynin. During the meeting Kissinger suddenly looked at me and looked back at the South African Ambassador and said, “You know Talcott Seelye?” And he said, “Yes.” “He is our PLO man in the State Department.”

At the last meeting Kissinger had in January before the Democrats came in in 1976, he called together the 30-40 top people in the State Department. Again Bill Schaufele was

away so I was there sitting in the middle of the long table. While he was telling everybody to continue business as usual until the new boys took over, he stopped in the middle and said, “I don't want Seelye in this interregnum recognizing the PLO.” There wasn't a crack of a smile on anybody's face although this was obviously a facetious dig.

Then at one point just before that he said to me, “Don't worry, when we have won the election, we will have a dialogue with the PLO.” Of course, you could never believe anything he said, never.

So, I arrived in AF in March, and now it is January 1977. The new administration comes in and Vance tells Bill Schaufele he wants to keep him on for continuity. So Bill stays on for about three or four months and then the shoe drops. The White House decides that it wants its own man for this position. It wanted a man clearly identified with the new Carter policy. So Dick Moose was selected to take over African Affairs. He was then Under Secretary for Administration, the job he has now. They told Bill Schaufele that they would get him an ambassadorship, which they did eventually. Meanwhile, what to do with me. I said to Bill rashly, “Bill, you brought me in here, you go, I go.” I had already had a few differences with Warren Christopher, who was Under Secretary, and is today Secretary, and who was the point man for human rights. Sometimes we thought that he carried it a little too far in terms of emphasizing human rights at the expense of other more important considerations.

In any case, I just said to Bill that if he was going, I was going, and I wanted to get back to the Middle East anyway. Africa was not my bag and I didn't know Dick Moose. I said I would overlap with Dick. So Bill went off to his ambassadorship. I think Dick tried to get me a couple of ambassadorships, but I have a feeling Christopher turned them down.

In any case I turned my duties over to Bill Harrop and went on leave for a couple of weeks in mid August after having overlapped with Dick Moose a couple of weeks. While I was on leave I got a call from Carol Laise, who was then Director General. She said, “What are

you going to do?" I said that I didn't have the vaguest idea. "Well," she said, "You have to do something. The promotion boards are coming up, how about heading a promotion board?" I said, "Sure." I went back to Washington to head a promotion board for FSOs from 4 to 3 or 5 to 4, or whatever it was, which was an interesting experience.

Just as I started, Bill Harrop called me and said, "We would like you to go for us back to Africa to attend in Zaire some anniversary of Mobutu's coming to power. Would I go?" I said, "Sure." So I left the panel and flew out to Zaire. I got in the boat with Mobutu and had a private meeting with him, etc.

Then Bill also asked me at another point to go out and address a labor conference in Tunisia. I was to be the AF representative. This also interrupted my promotion panel duties.

I finished the promotion panel after three months and went to see Roy Atherton who was still head of NEA. He said, "Well, there are two or three ambassadorships probably coming up in the Middle East, so things are looking up." I said, "I'll tell you want I will do. I will go and brush up on my Arabic." So I went over to FSI to meet with the head of FSI and said, "I would like to brush up on my Arabic." He said, "What is your ongoing assignment?" I said, "I don't have any." He said, "Well, we never give people Arabic training unless they have an ongoing assignment." I said, "Well, this is kind of unusual and if you want to call Roy Atherton he says there might be something coming up." Anyway we worked it out, and I was tutored for a couple of months.

Then Phil Habib called me and said, "Syria has opened up and all of us want you to go to Syria, except for one person." I said, "Who is that?" He said, "Warren Christopher." To this day I am not sure what the problem was between me and Warren Christopher.

Q: Henry Kissinger has his own sense of humor, do you think his twitting you about the PLO was taken seriously by others?

SEELYE: It might have been. I may have made a mistake in my modus operandi with Christopher. Christopher would call me and ask me to do something and I did. But not wanting to bother him, I would call his staff assistant and say, “Please let the Secretary know that I have done this.” I have a feeling that he didn't let the Secretary know and Christopher may have wondered why he never had a report of what I had done. Then we had a difference over how to respond to human rights frustrations in Ethiopia. Then, he is very short and I am very tall. I don't know exactly what the problem was.

Anyway, Habib said, “You have to do something about it.” I replied, “I'm supposed to do something about it? What can I do about it?” “Well, just go around and talk to people.” So I said to Phil, “Who is on the committee that makes these recommendations to the White House?” So he identified all the people—the assistant secretary for NEA, the under secretary for administration, the director general of the Foreign Service, etc. So I checked around and found that, as Phil said, everybody thought I would be the ideal person for Syria, but that Christopher had reservations. So what could I do but sit and wait.

The story that came back to me was that when they met they all supported me for the position, at which point Christopher said, “Well, with that kind of support, I withdraw my reservations and will send his name up.”

Q: What was your collision with Christopher over human rights in Ethiopia.

SEELYE: Well, what happened was that when Haile Selassie was shunted aside in 1976, Mengistu took over. He was a Marxist and close to the Soviets and brought in Cuban troops. We had had a major economic program and we discontinued it. I endorsed that. However, the World Bank also had programs that might be characterized as humanitarian programs, which were for the Ethiopian people. I felt that these programs should continue because these were people who would suffer if they didn't have aid. I can't remember the nature of that aid. I argued that we should allow this kind of support to continue. Christopher said that Ethiopia was in terrible violation of human rights and no one should

be allowed to help them including the World Bank. We were on the board and could veto it. I argued that we shouldn't veto it, we should allow it to happen. Well, finally he backed off and decided we would abstain and the World Bank went ahead with the assistance. I think he thought as a leftover from the Kissinger regime, I was somehow not sufficiently imbued with the human rights consideration.

Q: I was thinking that this might be a good place to stop. So let's set up another interview which will take you from your appointment and going to Syria.

SEELYE: Right.

Q: Today is March 8, 1994 and this is a continuing interview with Talcott Seelye. Talcott, the last time we were doing this you were appointed to be Ambassador to Syria. How did this appointment come about?

SEELYE: I think I covered that.

Q: Oh, yes, I think you did. Okay. You went to Syria when?

SEELYE: I went to Syria in August, 1978.

Q: When you went out to Syria what were your instructions and your mental list of things you wanted to do there?

SEELYE: The only item that I was instructed to raise with the Syrian government concerned Syrian Jews. The background was that there was a great deal of concern on the part of American Jewish politicians regarding the status of the small Jewish community in Syria—added up to about 4,000, mainly in Damascus. The American Jews were not entirely up-to-date on the situation because when Assad came to power in 1970, he eliminated various discriminatory measures that had been imposed on the Syrian Jews. There had been a prohibition from moving from point A to point B without government permission; they could not attend the university, etc. Assad eliminated all

those proscriptions with the exception of one. That was that the Jews could not emigrate from Syria. A Jewish businessman could go outside on business provided he posted a bond to make sure he would come back.

But nevertheless there was quite a lot of concern here. One of the special issues was the fact that young Jewish Syrian women could not find a Jewish man to marry. So Assad made a special concession during the honeymoon period after Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy and the resumption of relations. He allowed about a dozen of these Jewish women to come to the United States, mainly to Brooklyn because there are many Syrian Jews there, for the purpose of getting married. There was a desire on the part of the congressman from Brooklyn and others that more of these women be allowed to go to the United States.

So my instructions were to raise this issue with Assad when I first saw him. I was not instructed to raise any other issue, which I thought was quite a distortion of priorities in the Middle East context.

Q: You, as Ambassador, know what the issues are when you go out. I am sure there are water issues, relations with Israel and Lebanon, etc. One can think of a whole series of things. Did you have your own agenda?

SEELYE: Being an old Middle East hand and having handled Syrian affairs among other things in the late sixties and early seventies, I was pretty aware of what the issues were. And people in NEA and the Department knew that I knew as much about that as anybody else in the Service. So I guess they didn't feel it was necessary to give me briefings or guidance on those basic issues.

What were those issues? Well, quite clearly, one of the problems was that the Syrian-American relationship at that point was cooling. It had reached a kind of peak just after the resumption of relations in 1974. Then Ambassador Richard Murphy was seeing Assad more than an ambassador normally would because it was just after the first

disengagement agreement negotiated between Syria and Israel. There was a second disengagement agreement proposed between Syria and Israel but Assad decided to refuse that particular initiative (although the parallel initiative did proceed between Syria and Egypt) because he felt that at that point Kissinger was just chipping away at the problem. It was piece by piece, in an effort to tranquilize the situation in the Middle East. Through the first disengagement agreement Assad was able to get a little territory back from the Israelis, such as the town Quanaytrah on the Golan Heights. But he wasn't going to get much more back because the Israelis were well entrenched on the Golan Heights and he sensed at that point that Kissinger wasn't really interested in a comprehensive agreement. He was just moving slowly and wanted to tranquilize the situation. So Assad decided he wasn't going to buy any more of this.

That was the beginning of the deterioration of the relationship. It began to move back to what it had been before 1974 when relations were frozen after the 1967 war. So I knew that I was arriving at a difficult time. As I recall, I don't remember exactly, I think at that point talks were going on at Camp David and I realized once those talks were completed and there was a separate peace agreement between Egypt and Israel Assad would be antagonized. So I was aware of the challenge of going out to a country where relations were cooling and where the challenge was to establish some kind of personal rapport with key officials to overcome the official coolness in the relationship. And this was what I devoted my efforts to doing.

So when I arrived, I dutifully did raise the matter of the question of the Syrian Jews to President Assad when I presented my credentials. You have a period of small talk after the formal ceremony, but he didn't respond, he just listened. I knew I was doing it pro forma and I think he knew I was doing it pro forma. And, of course, we did discuss other things. But that was the only point that I raised at the request of Washington.

Q: What was the situation in Syria when you arrived?

SEELYE: Of course Assad had been in power there for 8 years. It was a dictatorship. The economy was not doing too well, it was socialized. You had the Baath Party, which was entrenched in the civil service of the government with a socialist, Marxist mind-set. Many of the officials had been trained in Eastern Europe or in the Soviet Union because those were the only free scholarships that were given to Syrians in that period. So they had, of course, blinders on and were very ideological. At the same time the main issue as it evolved between the United States and Syria was Lebanon of the potential there for a Syrian-Israeli confrontation. In 1976 Syria had entered Lebanon in order to keep the civil war from blowing up even more. And it did so with our blessing because at that point the Christian Maronite faction in Lebanon was in the process of being overrun by a combination of militia composed of the Muslim militia, Communist militia, Druze militia, Palestinian militia, etc. They formed a coalition and were winning the battles on the ground. Syria has always had an interest in Lebanon because Lebanon was carved out of Syria by the French back in the twenties, and Syria has never forgotten that. In fact, Syria has never had diplomatic relations with Lebanon, it has felt that the two countries are one and the same territories. In 1976 Syria decided that it was in its interest to keep the Maronites from collapsing because it felt that the way to maintain relative stability in Lebanon was through a balance of forces. Syria recognized that the weakest force in Lebanon at this point was the Maronites, so it went in to save their necks.

There may also have been an element of minority sympathies. The Maronites had become a minority in Lebanon. The Alawite leadership in Syria is a 12 percent minority and sometimes minorities feel that they can do better if they hang together against the majority.

So the Syrians were in. In the process we negotiated behind the scenes a so-called red-line agreement whereby the Syrians would not go further south than a so-called red line drawn some ten or twelve miles or so north of the Lebanese-Israeli border. This enabled Israel to waive objection to the Syrian entry.

So the Syrians went in and it was at the request of the Lebanese government, which was worried about the situation, and the Syrians restored the equilibrium. Later on, of course, they were to get behind the opposition coalition in order to prevent an imbalance in favor of the Maronites.

As I arrived in Syria, almost immediately things were beginning to blow up in Lebanon. There was a civil war there and every now and then the threat of an Israeli-Syrian confrontation. I realized that one of my primary assignments was to get the United States to serve as a middle man to prevent things from getting out of hand. During my first week in Damascus, as I recall, I was involved in talks with the Syrian foreign minister and others in an effort to defuse the situation. It looked as if the Syrians and Israelis might be drawn into a clash over some incident in Lebanon. And that became really the primary focus of my contacts with the Syrians. In fact Lebanon was so much on the front burner of our relations with Syria that I, as American Ambassador in Syria, saw more of the foreign minister, more of Syrian officials concerned with foreign policy than any other ambassador.

Q: You were dealing mainly with the foreign ministry?

SEELYE: Well, I would see the foreign minister when I had to make an important demarche or important presentation, but I developed a day-to-day relationship with the deputy foreign minister, who happened to be a very congenial person who was well regarded in the system and by the President. He was a member of the establishment and yet he had a kind of empathy and willingness to see me and we developed a good personal relationship. That kind of saved the day, because if something happened in the middle of the night, as it often did in that part of the world, I could call him—he had given me his home telephone number—and try to work things out.

So that was the main personal relationship that I established that helped, particularly in the Lebanese context.

Q: To burrow in a little more, when you say you called him at night and whatever, and worked things out, can you give an idea of how one works things out?

SEELYE: I am trying to remember now. There was one incident, for example, when the Israelis came into Lebanon quite far and shot down some Syrian helicopters because the Israelis felt that somehow their clients, the Maronites, were being threatened by Syrian helicopters operating in Lebanon. So the Israelis shot down these helicopters deep into Lebanon. The Syrians then moved some SAM missiles located along the border onto the Lebanese side of the border. My task was to try to defuse the situation. My counterpart in Israel, Sam Lewis, was doing the same thing. We didn't want this thing to blow up. For my part I was trying to get the Syrians to pull their SAM missiles back. This sort of thing.

Q: You would describe this to him and then he would go back and talk with the foreign minister or somebody like that?

SEELYE: Yes, that's right.

Q: Looking at it during this time, it is very difficult to me. Here is two nations essentially still in a state of war, Syria and Israel.

SEELYE: Right.

Q: What was your impression of the actual facts of the matter? How did you find the Syrians?

SEELYE: There was a lot of misunderstanding, I think, about the Syrian position. Assad had in response to the initiatives taken by the U.S. in 1973-74 finally agreed to this basic Security Council Resolution 242, which was then supplemented by 338 (which was a reaffirmation of 242 in the context of the 1973 war) calling for Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories, meaning the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights, in return for an Arab undertaking to make peace with Israel. Assad had not signed onto the Resolution

in 1967, but he did agree to it in 1974. Thus, in 1974 he agreed to the principle of peace in return for Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights. People often ignore that. While I was there it was reported to me that European foreign ministers would discuss some of the modalities of a peace agreement with the Syrians. For example, Syrian officials agreed informally in these meetings to some kind of peacekeeping force on the Golan Heights in return for peace. This was way back in the late seventies.

But this was not clear to others because the Syrian media was so bombastic, which is so true in that part of the world where often rhetoric bears little resemblance to reality. The Syrian press, TV and radio were always blasting Israel and the United States and calling us enemies, etc. Yet, quietly the Syrians were briefing people and saying that if Israel withdraws from the Golan Heights we might work out a deal. But all people outside Syria heard was the rhetoric. I had the task of trying to make clear to Washington that they shouldn't be taken in by this rhetoric. For example, the Minister of Defense, Mustafatlas, who was not a very rational person, liked to shoot his mouth off and make wild statements. Washington would get quite upset. I tried to point out that this was pure rhetoric and in any case he didn't speak for Assad. He was going off on his own.

So, it was difficult to make people understand that Syrian policy was not as represented by the media rhetoric

Q: Talking about the media rhetoric, did you have Western, particularly American, news media TV or newspapers? And could you sort of make the point that you just made to me about the bombast, because these are people familiar with the area anyway and did this seem to translate into realistic reporting?

SEELYE: Occasionally, but we didn't have very many Western reporters coming in. But once they got there they understood this phenomenon and would report accurately. Occasionally the AP correspondent came across from Beirut. Sometimes journalists would come in the hope of getting an interview with Assad. So there would occasionally be items

on Syria that would appear in the United States that would be balanced. But they wouldn't be picked up by everybody and would be overwhelmed by the daily FBIS-kind of reports that quoted the Syrian rhetoric.

Q: How about visiting congressmen, did you have any visits?

SEELYE: we had a couple. I had been there only a few weeks when Congressman Solarz came to check into the plight of Syrian Jews. He is from Brooklyn and, as I indicated earlier, most Syrian Jews living in the United States live in Brooklyn. So he came to ascertain the situation. We took him around to see officials, and he met with the Jewish leaders in Damascus. Then he asked to see a representative from the Jewish community up in Qamishli, in the northwest near the border with Turkey. They drove down all night but he never saw them. He sent a sidekick to see them, which made me conclude that Mr. Solarz was more interested in being able to go back and tell his constituents that he had met with everyone and he didn't really care whether he had met with them or not. Very much a politician, obviously. After having, I thought, briefed him pretty well and exposing him to this and that, I remember at the last breakfast we had (he was there about three days) he said, “I don't think that the Palestinian question is relevant to a resolution of the Arab-Israeli problem.” He turned out to be a bit of a headache. He wanted to ship rugs back through the diplomatic pouch, which, of course, is illegal. I don't think I gave him permission to do that, although my wife said that I did. Then he was caught driving into Lebanon with too much currency or something and was held for a while. So I didn't get the impression that Mr. Solarz was the most upstanding individual. I had had a run in with him once before. I think I mentioned it earlier on, or had I mentioned it?

Q: I am not sure, but you might mention it to be certain.

SEELYE: I had been deputy assistant secretary for African Affairs a year before that and my boss was away quite often so I was acting assistant secretary and had gone up to the Hill to testify on aid to Southern Africa. I had finished my presentation to the

Subcommittee on Africa, headed by Congressman Diggs. I noticed on the raised dais, where the congressmen sit and look down upon you imposingly, that the seat was empty behind the name plate of Congressman Solarz. I had finished my presentation, I had been there about 25 minutes, and in he walked.

Q: You did mention that.

SEELYE: Okay, so I mentioned that. I challenged him and he asked me a question and somehow I reacted negatively to the way he asked it and said, “Well, Congressman Solarz, if you had been here on time you would have heard my answer, I have already answered that question.” Then he was defensive and said, “Well, I was at the White House, etc.”

So, he came to Damascus and concluded that the Palestinian issue is irrelevant and probably thought that I was not pushing the Jewish question enough. And to jump ahead a bit but to continue this theme, this thread, a year or two later I was told by Washington that Solarz had put before the Hill, Congress, a proposed resolution condemning the Syrians for not allowing all the Jews to leave Syria, and what did I think of it? I wrote a cable back and said, “Well, the Syrians have been unresponsive so far to this request to allow more Jews to leave, but there is always a possibility they might do so and we are working on it. If this resolution is submitted to Congress, it will obviously ruin any chance at all of the Syrians releasing any more girls. So I don't think the resolution a good idea.” I sent this cable EXDIS/STADIS, which meant it would go to NEA only, limited distribution. Then I added gratuitously, which of course was kind of stupid of me, and this came about because of my feelings about Congressman Solarz, obviously, “However, if Congressman Solarz wants to put this resolution before Congress just because of domestic/political considerations, that's not for me to answer.” That message was passed to the Jewish representative. You know we have a Jewish representative all the time in the White House, somebody to defend American-Jewish interests. He also has an office in the State Department. This was Mr. Sanders. Despite the limited distribution somebody sent this

cable to Mr. Sanders and he sent it to Congressman Solarz, who blew his stack and called Secretary Vance and said something like, “Get Seelye out of there.” I am not sure what Secretary Vance said, maybe something like, “How did you get ahold of the cable?”

So those were my associations with Congressmen Solarz. He was only one of two Congressional delegations that came. The other congressman who came was another New York congressman but he was not representing his district but representing some United Nations organization. AID was sponsoring him because his mission, as I recall, had to do with population control or something like that. The first night he asked the AID control officer to get him a woman.

So those were the only two congressmen I had.

Q: A little footnote. Right now as we talk Congressman Solarz has lost an election in Brooklyn. It went Hispanic. He has been nominated to be ambassador to India, but the whole thing has been held up because apparently his income tax situation isn't exactly...

SEELYE: There were a lot of things. It has finally been approved, by the way, although it was held up for a long time. Other problems were that he apparently sponsored a Hong Kong businessman with a criminal record, got him into this country. Then he was the worst offender on the House with regard to overdrawing their accounts. I think all of these things probably delayed his appointment, but he has now been approved by the Senate.

Q: What was your impression of Assad before you went there, it dealing with him and also any differences in how you analyzed him and how others did?

SEELYE: I had been in charge of what we call Arabian North Affairs in the Department which included Syria back in 1968-72, when Assad came to power, so I followed him very closely. However, I had never met him before. I think when one meets him you see an additional dimension to Assad. If one hears about him from afar he comes across as a tough guy, shrewd, very adroit, who runs Syria with an armed fist. But when you meet him

personally, as I did for the first time when I presented my credentials, you found a man very at ease, very laid back, very pleasant with a nice smile on his face, very responsive, with the appearance of having lots of time, a good sense of humor, a very attractive personality.

Q: Not dour? Somehow dour has always struck me as the operative term.

SEELYE: No, he isn't that way at all. Just very low key and laid back, responsive and curious and bright. So that is what one learns by meeting him firsthand. I had the impression before I got there that there was a difference between him and Saddam. I had also followed Saddam Hussein closely because he came to power in Iraq about the same time, although at first he was the power behind the scenes. When Saddam came to power in Iraq I became aware of his ruthlessness. How he wiped out the intellectual elite of Baghdad and how bloody-minded and basically how brutal a person he was. I had felt that Assad was much more calculating and much more discriminating when it came to the use of force and terror. And that was borne out when I was there. If the regime was challenged, Assad was ruthless.

Q: There was this revolt in Hama...?

SEELYE: That happened after I left, but it was building up while I was there because the Moslem Brotherhood was beginning to get up a head of steam while I was there. We could hear explosions right near the embassy resulting from an attack by some gang of the Moslem Brotherhood against some Baathist office or residence. We had reports that the Brotherhood was getting stronger, particularly up in the Hama, which has always been a bastion of Islamic conservatism. A couple of times even Soviet military advisers were attacked. In Damascus members of the Mulchbarat (Security Service) which drove around in land rovers. Whenever you saw a land rover you knew it was the Mulchbarat, except that the Soviet advisers also drove land rovers. A total of 12 Soviet military advisers were killed in the course of time, either because the Brotherhood thought they were Mulchbarat

or maybe because they knew they were Russians and felt that since the Russians were close to Assad they were legitimate targets. I used to joke privately that here was the American Ambassador who is representing a country that was not enjoying good relations, and yet I didn't feel really in danger. Although there was an incident once that indicated that this was not always the case. But here were the Russians who were close to Syria and got shot at and some were killed.

The Moslem Brotherhood movement was gaining strength and at first Assad tried to cut a deal with them. At the same time he threw a lot of them in jail, those he could get his hands on. But the situation still got worse. Up in Aleppo at one point, while cadets in the cadet academy were in an auditorium, ninety were killed by machine guns fired through the windows. The Brotherhood was considered responsible and there was some evidence that Iraq was colluding with the organization. In the fall of 1978, just after I got there, there was an effort to bring Iraq and Syria together and they met in Damascus, with the idea of unity. But it fell apart, it didn't work out. As months went by tensions increased between the two countries. And the Syrians claimed to have evidence that the Iraqis were helping the Brotherhood, providing them with arms, and were behind some of these incidents like the cadet massacre. So things were building up. At one point the Syrian government decided to teach the Brotherhood a lesson. There is a big prison up near Palmyra and a lot of the prisoners there were political prisoners, many who were members of the Brotherhood or suspected of being so. They were let out as if they were going to be freed, several hundred of them. Then with helicopters and armored cars the Syrian police and military just mowed them down.

One was aware of the bestiality in Assad, but it was not quite to the same degree as in the case of Saddam. Saddam did it every day. Assad did it only when he felt challenged. He felt challenged by this group and wanted to teach them a lesson. Well, of course, that affair in Palmyra only incensed the Brotherhood even more. The uprising in Hama occurred after I left, in 1982. The Brotherhood in Hama rose up against the government and killed Assad's officials in Hama. So the government decided that this was the last

straw. It sent in elite troops who just wiped out half the city and killed 15,000-20,000 people, men, women and children. This was ruthless, but there hasn't been a peep out of the Brotherhood ever since in the last twelve years. That is Assad's modus operandi.

Q: Did you feel that Assad understood the dynamics of American policy?

SEELYE: Not entirely. He was kind of isolated, had limited exposure to the outside world. He had gone to the cadet academy and had been a pilot. He had brief training in England, after he had become a pilot, for maybe six months. He may have visited a few other Arab countries, but he was pretty much isolated from the outside world. But he had an insatiable curiosity to learn. Whenever important visitors came he was always asking very leading questions about this and that. So he was learning. I think he read a lot. So he began to become a little more aware of realities, but he still had gaps, no question about it.

I remember one time when I was with him he claimed that the United States had been involved in one of the Brotherhood's actions in Syria. I said, “Well, Mr. President, I can tell you categorically that we were not.” He smiled and said, “Well, we have evidence.” I said, “I would like to see the evidence.” And then I tried to figure out what he was talking about and it turned out that the Brotherhood in Jordan had been involved in helping the Syrian Brotherhood with arms and other political support and King Hussein had looked the other way. In fact, he may not have known the extent of the support because it was orchestrated by some of his own security people. And I supposed that Assad assumed that if the Jordanians were involved, therefore ipso facto the U.S., being close to Jordan, was involved. And that was the kind of feeling he had about Israeli actions. If Israel did something against the Arabs the United States was implicated because it was felt that Israel operated only with U.S. permission. This was a reflection of his naivet# and his insularity. He thought that if Jordan did something, obviously it had to be done with the approval, if not the participation, of the U.S.

Q: Would you say his mind-set was that of the United States manipulating Israel rather than, as I think most of us feel, Israel being the tail wagging the American dog?

SEELYE: I don't necessarily think he thought the United States was manipulating Israel, but he thought any Israeli action was done with the approval of the United States, if not the active collaboration.

People forget that he was really scared to death of Israel. By the time I got there (after the 1973 war) the Israelis had not only taken back the Golan Heights in 1967, they had taken more territory and they were on the down side overlooking Damascus. So they were within range of Damascus. Assad knew the quality of the Israeli forces, how strong they were. Qualitatively they were stronger than his army, although Assad had a larger military force. So he was very careful to eschew any military confrontation. Occasionally he would bluff, as I mentioned with the incident with the missiles, and maybe at some point he would have been willing to risk everything for honor but basically he was very careful not to antagonize or draw the Israelis into a war because he knew he would get badly beaten. He was concerned by the threat from Israel. He would hear the warlord types like Sharon beating the drums and advocating taking out Syria. And, of course, this is the reason he tried to get as much in the way of arms from the Soviet Union as he could. In fact, there was one point when he tried to get the Soviets, themselves, to commit themselves to bringing in combat troops. The Soviet troops there were military advisers. After I left, when the situation in Lebanon blew and the U.S. was involved with the marines, etc., the Soviets did at one point agree to man some of the surface-to-air missiles in Syria. That was the furthest they ever went to getting involved in potential combat. But Assad tried to drag the Soviets in because he was afraid he wouldn't be able to match Israel if Syria got into a war. He was trying to achieve military parity with Israel. This was kind of naive because he must have been aware, subconsciously at least, that the United States was never going to allow Israel ever to be militarily inferior to Syria or to any other Arab country. But nevertheless this was the line he took.

Q: What was the role of the Soviets there as we saw it at that time?

SEELYE: The Soviets had a military training mission, quite large, several thousand men. The Eastern Europeans were helping them with their security service. They had some economic aid from Eastern Europe and the Russians. The Russians were very generous about their arms supplies. For a long time the Syrians didn't pay in cash. There was a barter arrangement, but, of course, the Syrians could never barter enough goods to pay for the arms. They are still in tremendous debt to the Russians. And yet, Assad carefully restricted the Communist party in Syria. He formed a Progressive Front composed of five parties, which was really nothing more than just a show because the only important party was the Baath party. But he pretended to have a little more pluralism by having the five parties of the Progressive Front, of which one was the Communist party. But the Communists weren't even allowed to publish a newspaper. So on the one hand he tightly controlled the Communists within Syria and on the other hand he paid absolutely no attention to Soviet advice and counsel in regard to foreign policy. Constantly the Soviets were tearing their hair over policy moves by Assad. For example, they were never happy with Syria's moving into Lebanon. They thought that was self-defeating and would weaken him and hurt him. They were very upset one time when Assad was quite mad at the Jordanians and some of the other Arabs who were having a summit in Amman. This must have been about the fall of 1980, and he decided to make a show of force. He sent a division down to the Jordanian border. I knew it was a bluff. He was just trying to make the point that he was not happy with the summit's decisions. He was at odds with Jordan and some of the other Arab countries at that point. The Soviets were quite upset because just before that Assad had signed the Soviet-Syrian Friendship Treaty, which according to the text of the treaty requires mutual consultation before and certainly after any military move. Not only did Assad not tell the Soviets before he moved his troops, he didn't tell them about it after he did it. Then the Soviets were upset with the fact that Assad had gotten involved supporting Iran against Iraq. The Soviets knew this took them out of the Arab mainstream and isolated him. They were also upset because he rejected Arafat. He

had a running feud with Arafat. Other Arab states felt Arafat was the legitimate head of the Palestinians and were helping Arafat with arms and money. The Soviets felt the Syrians were making a mistake in opposing Arafat.

Assad, to my knowledge, only once ever responded to Soviet policy desires in foreign policy and that was when he was the only Arab state to support the Soviets on Afghanistan. He could afford to do that because it had no bearing on the immediate Middle East situation confronting him.

Q: This happened in December, 1979...at least the Soviets brought their troops in and invaded Afghanistan then...were you there at that time?

SEELYE: Yes.

Q: I assume you went and made a protest or something like that?

SEELYE: No, I don't remember doing that. Maybe I did, I can't remember. We used to get instructions from IO, as you know, all the time on all kinds of international issues. We would get instructions to intervene on every imaginable issue. We would go in pro forma at the level of the desk officer and make a protest and everybody knew it was pro forma. Of course Afghanistan was important.

Q: This was number one on our agenda.

SEELYE: But Assad didn't supply any substantive support and I don't remember him making a big issue out of it. He did it very quietly. Maybe the U.S. didn't even know about it at the time.

Q: You were into the Carter period when you went out. Kissinger had been on the shuttle diplomacy. Did Assad ever talk about his friend Henry?

SEELYE: No, he never did in my presence. Just after the Kissinger initiative he had met with Carter in Geneva, about a year before I got to Damascus when Dick Murphy was there. Assad never mentioned that to me but I heard that he was happy with the meeting with Carter but disappointed with the results. He thought that Carter was going to solve the Palestine questions. One of the signs of Assad's naivet# on international affairs, or maybe he just took this position, I don't know, was that he assumed that when the U.S. said, “We are going to try to do this or work with Israel and hope to achieve this,” he thought we had committed ourselves. For example, at one time Phil Habib was called into action as negotiator on Lebanon after the Israelis had invaded in 1982 and went all the way to Beirut. Phil Habib was negotiating a disengagement agreement involving an Israeli withdrawal. The Syrians agreed to the cease fire that Habib negotiated, on the basis that they said they thought that this was an undertaking that Israel would withdraw from Lebanon. I am sure nobody like Habib could guarantee another country's doing something. You can't guarantee the action of another country. All he could say was, “Well, the Israelis have undertaken to withdraw and we are going to put their feet to the fire.” Well, as we know they didn't withdraw all the way, they hung on to twelve miles of Lebanese territory. And Assad felt he had been diddled by us as a result. Once again he thought that the U.S. could have just told Israel to withdraw. So this was one basis for misunderstandings between U.S. and Syria, because Assad felt we could do things that we couldn't do. Israel called more shots in Washington than we called in Tel Aviv.

Q: Was there a mind-set within the State Department at that time that you felt was different than your appreciation on the scene of Assad?

SEELYE: I didn't feel that there was any difference between me and the desk, for example. Morris Draper, who was in charge of the North Arabian Affairs, certainly understood fully. I felt the State Department understood. But the people at the top I'm sure weren't aware of the situation. They were always getting delegations from Congress telling them how terrible Syria was. The Camp David Agreement was finally signed just after I got there and

that, of course, didn't help things. Assad was furious that Sadat had gone off on his own. He felt that the only way that Syria could get any concessions from Israel was if the Arabs moved in tandem and all got concessions together. He now felt isolated and that pressure on Israel to make concessions to Syria in a peace agreement was alleviated. Assad felt he had lost a bargaining chip. So he was very upset. I remember Vance came to Damascus after the Camp David Agreement was signed. Assad was very polite to Vance. He is always very polite. I had a sense that Vance kind of understood Assad. At one point Assad raised the Palestinian question and Vance went so far as to say that some day there would be a Palestinian state and we would support it.

I got the impression that some people in Washington were often taken in by the Syrian rhetoric. For example, when Assad mobilized his troops on the Syrian border much earlier, I knew it was a bluff. You can ask me how did I know it was a bluff and I guess it was just intuition. If you are in an area long enough you have a sixth sense about things. But my colleague in Amman didn't know this was a bluff and he sent NIACT messages to Washington urging that the U.S. provide a special military show of force for King Hussein to deter Assad from invading. Washington got kind of taken in by some of those cables. I was crying in the wilderness. I loved King Hussein too, I had handled Jordanian affairs, etc., but the realities were that Assad was not going to go into Jordan. If we identify too closely militarily with a close friend like Hussein, it only stigmatizes this friend in the eyes of his adversaries. Washington may have thought that my assessment was the result of being an Arabist and being too pro-Syrian.

Q: How did that play out? Did we get involved?

SEELYE: Well, Assad removed his troops. We may have made some token gestures, but I have forgotten what they were.

Q: Speaking of the ambassadors, here you had Jordan, Israel and Lebanon being key players sitting there, and at that time we really didn't have much representation in Iraq, did we?

SEELYE: We had an interest section there but it was just hanging on my its fingernails.

Q: Were you all reporting and seeing the world the same way?

SEELYE: No. I and Sam Lewis, in Tel Aviv, were not. He would occasionally send cables saying that the Israelis were very upset because the Syrians were mobilizing. I would cable saying that the Syrians were only involved in maneuvers, which was true. At one point the second Middle East negotiator after Strauss was due to come out to the area, but at the last minute he said he couldn't come to the area and would meet us in Rome or Paris. He asked the three of us ambassadors from Israel, Jordan and Syria to go up there. I said to Sam, “Lets get together and try to iron things out so we all will understand what the Syrians are really up to.” Actually the meeting was canceled, but Sam and I met in Paris anyway. We had dinner together and I tried to point out to Sam that what I was saying was accurate, the Syrians bluffed a lot, etc. But I think Sam felt I was probably too pro-Syrian. I certainly felt he was too pro-Israeli, so there we are.

I had very good relations with Nick Veliotes in Jordan, but Nick, not being a Middle Eastern hand, also didn't quite understand Syria. I was amused by the fact that he would not allow his people to visit Damascus because he heard about these occasional bombings by the Brotherhood and all. Well, my wife was going down to the souk everyday. We weren't worried. I tried to point out to Nick that Damascus was a delightful city to visit in contrast to Amman which has little to offer a tourist and he should let his people come. He never would. So he was very cautious about that. I think it was wrong, but that was his judgment.

Q: Also, too, I think something like that will cause a feeling within an embassy. If you can't go to a place it assumes proportions that don't help.

SEELYE: With regard to Beirut, the Ambassador there was John Gunther Dean most of the time I was there. I thought he did a very good job. What impressed me was he arrived without any background on Lebanon and there is always the danger that a newcomer to Lebanon, getting caught up in the Maronite social set, would get a kind of jaundiced view of things. But Dean maintained his balance very well. We would meet occasionally at Chtawa, which was on the border, to compare notes. But John did all the talking and I rarely got a word in so these meetings proved unproductive, as far as I was concerned.

Q: Camp David was pretty much a done deal by the time you got there, wasn't it?

SEELYE: Yes.

Q: Did you get much out of that?

SEELYE: Oh, yes, the Syrians were very upset about it. I had, of course, to go in to the Foreign Ministry and defend the agreement and I did my best to point out the positive aspects of it. But the Syrians were very unhappy with it, Assad particularly. That cooled our relationship even more. Of course, Mr. Kaplan in his book on Arabists totally distorted my position.

Q: We are talking about an author called Robert Kaplan who wrote a book recently on the Arabist.

SEELYE: And Kaplan claimed that I opposed the Camp David Agreement and that I left the Foreign Service because of my opposition to it, which was, of course, ridiculous. I have had a long correspondence with him and finally after having sent him a clipping from an AP report on my exit interview from Damascus I was able to get him to concede the fact that what I said was not that I opposed the Camp David Agreement per se, but that what I said was, and this was two years after the Camp David Agreement had already been signed, that in ongoing peace negotiations as they occurred, if and when, we should not use the Camp David label because it had become a red flag in all Arab countries, except

Egypt, and it would be better just to use a different context. I didn't mean to say that we should not follow the formula of proposing exchange territory for peace or anything like that, but that there should be a label to these talks that avoided reference to Camp David. Kaplan finally conceded that he was wrong, but it is too late. That is in the book and it makes me look foolish. In any case, how can a person resign over Camp David when it was two years after the agreement was signed?

Q: How did you find your embassy at that time, as a team and all this?

SEELYE: I think it was a pretty good team. It was a small embassy and we therefore had a lot of interchange. We had a meeting every morning with the key members of the country team. One day a week we had a larger meeting of all officers. I think I was satisfied with the caliber of the people there. We had one Arabist, who was the DCM, who was an expert in the Arab world. Our political officer had worked with me in Washington. He was not an Arabist but he was a good officer. The economic officer was really terrific. He was an Arabist and a great outside man. In the Foreign Service you have some people who are good inside and some who are good outside, some are both. Some are good at writing reports and research and not too good at going out and talking to people and picking up information. This economic officer was a great outside man. He would be out there with the business people and all and pick up the current thinking or gossip, which was useful. What are the complaints, what are the stories being told about Assad, etc.? He was a great asset. His name was Pat Theros. He later became DCM in Jordan and I think he is now in the Department. So I was satisfied with the team.

Half way through we got a station chief who was a real gung-ho guy, maybe a little too gung-ho, but very able. The military attach#s were good, I thought. There wasn't much for a military attach# to do there because the Syrian military refused to see him then. The exception was a liaison officer assigned to receive all the military attach#s. The minister of defense wouldn't see our attach# nor would the chief of staff. So all he could do was run around in his car and try to see where all the troops were deployed. I remember the chief

of staff, who is still there, his name is Hikonat Shihaki, actually went to Fort Leavenworth's Command and General Staff School, way back before the Baathists came to power. He is a Sunni, incidentally. In the honeymoon period when Dick Murphy was there, he would see the military attach# and Murphy could see him if necessary, but after the Camp David Agreement those contacts ended. Just before I left Damascus, after I had been there about three years, at some big reception I was wandering around when I heard a voice say to me, “Don't you know me?” I looked around and there was a guy in uniform smiling who said, “I am Hikonat Shehaki.” I said, “I am glad to meet you. I've been trying to see you for three years.” And he laughed.

So the cold relationship inhibited my access to the military as to Baath officials. But I was able to see cabinet ministers, of course. In addition to the Deputy Foreign Minister, with whom I had a very good relationship, the Minister of Economy, Mohamed Inadi, was a great friend in court. And he is still there, by the way, as Minister of Economy. He is married to an American and has a Ph.D. from Columbia. I think in a way that Assad may have quietly designated him to deal with me, so to speak. More than that he had a very positive inclination towards the United States and wasn't reluctant to show it to me despite the environment in which he was operating. Assad, I think, thought highly of him. And he was very helpful.

I should have mentioned one other congressional visit which relates to the Ministry of Economy. Senator Byrd of West Virginia came. He was out in the Middle East with a White House plane on some kind of mission. Of course he wanted to have an appointment with Assad fixed before he came. Well, the policy in Syria is that nobody gets an appointment with the President until after arrival in Damascus. Once you are there at the President's leisure he will (or may) agree to an appointment. Well, Byrd wasn't very happy about this, but he came. Unfortunately, just as he arrived, Assad took off for Latakia, up north. So I took Byrd to see some ministers and I had a dinner for him and briefed him. He was scheduled to be there for only 24 hours but he agreed to extend his visit for another 24 hours if he could see Assad. So I went to see Inadi and asked, “What are we going to do?

The main reason Byrd came to Damascus was to see Assad. He is upset because he can't see him. Byrd is very influential in the Senate. He can be very influential in legislation that could affect Syria. In fact it might affect you now." At that point we had a big AID program of $100 million a year. I said, "This could hurt the AID program and you know how important that is. What can we do?" Inadi replied, "Well, I will see what I can do." I left and he called me up later. He said, "Is there any way that Byrd can extend his stay another 24 hours because I think the President will be coming back tomorrow." Byrd said, "No, I can't wait any longer, I have to go to Jeddah. I have already extended my visit for a day." So I said to the minister, "Well, he just can't stay, what can we do?" And then the minister and I somehow came up with the idea of having Byrd go on to Jeddah and then stop in Syria again on his way out. We proposed that to Byrd and he said, "Okay. Is the meeting definite?" The minister assured us it was.

So Byrd came back and saw Assad. That propitiated Byrd and he had a good meeting and went back happy.

That was an example of how hard it was to pin down Assad. If a correspondent came and wanted to have an interview with Assad I would say, "You will have to sit around the hotel for a week or two before you hear anything." In fact, the first time I went back to Damascus after I left Syria, in 1984—every year I take a group of oil analysts and investment managers on an orientation trip, and this was our first trip to Syria—I requested an appointment with Assad. Meanwhile I had lined up other meetings. I couldn't sit around waiting. Just as we were leaving the Sheraton Hotel for a meeting, just by luck somebody ran out to tell me that the President would see us in ten minutes. The Presidency just happened to catch us. If we had gone on to our scheduled meeting we never would have seen Assad. But if you are there for only three or four days and you want to see a lot of people you just can't sit around waiting just to see the President.

Q: As the ambassador in a place as you have described, a difficult environment, how did you operate? How did you run your day?

SEELYE: Well, of course, I had bodyguards. The Syrians assigned three bodyguards that rotated in turns.

We had a large economic aid program. This was part of the purchase of Assad support for agreeing to UNSC Resolution 242, and the first disengagement agreement. It amounted to $100 million a year. In addition to road building and water development and electrifying the villages, we set up an English language institute that would teach English to mid-level Syrian officials going to the United States on participant training programs. Somebody who is with the water department would go to the States for three months and visit our water departments, etc. But they had to know enough English to cope and a lot of them didn't. So they would study English at the institute for eight months or more. So some of my time was spent on keeping up with and visiting the various projects. People don't know that we electrified villages in Syria that never had had electricity before.

Then, of course, we had political reporting with the usual staff trying to ferret out what was going on. We had some pretty good contacts. There was a local AP correspondent who would come in to see me quite often. I would brainstorm a lot with two or three other ambassadors. The British Ambassador was really very sharp, an old Middle East hand. We used to compare notes a lot on what was going on.

There were visitors coming in. We had a USIA program, of course. We tried to keep in touch with the academic community, which was not political. I did a lot of entertaining. I used to have dinner parties and try to get a mixture of business and government. In those days nobody could be invited to the ambassador's residence until he got approval from the Foreign Ministry. So the invitation had to be stamped by the Foreign Ministry. Most everybody who got an invitation would make sure that the invitation was stamped by the Foreign Ministry. However, some guests said they couldn't care less. Requiring this stamp could have been a disincentive for people to come, but in a sense it was an incentive because if the security forces questioned them about consorting with the American

Ambassador, they could show the Foreign Ministry approval. So in a way it was useful for them to have that.

And I would also travel around the country. I tried to visit as many of the main municipal centers as I could. I must say the mayors were very hospitable and threw big dinners, despite the cool country-to-country relationship. Several times I went up to visit archeological sites run by Americans. I remember once developing a good relationship with the local mayor of a village along the Euphrates. He came down to Damascus once and came to see me. I was afraid he was going to get himself into trouble with the security people. Living so far from Damascus he probably wasn't aware of the political dynamics of the Syrian-American relationship. So I was worried. I hoped that he hadn't been picked up.

One time I was in Aleppo and I went to see the head of the Baath Party. That was the only time in all my experience of 30 odd years in the Middle East that I have gotten a deep freeze from an Arab. You know normally Arabs, even if they are hostile to you, have a veneer of friendship and congeniality. I walked into this guy's office, he looked up from his desk and gave me a look that would have killed. He then returned to his papers. I stood there and asked, “May I sit down?” I had about 20-30 minutes with him and he remained hostile the whole time. It was good to have that experience. He showed exactly what he felt about me as the American representative.

Q: What about the Syrian media? You said they were full of bombast. Did you get anywhere with them?

SEELYE: No, I left that pretty much to the PAO. I did see the Minister of Information from time to time, and he was very outgoing. Occasionally I felt I had to go to the Foreign Minister and complain. You get inured to it after a while but sometimes they would make such outrageous accusations that I would have to go and complain. After that massacre of the cadets that I mentioned to you I went in to see the Foreign Minister and said, “Look, this is going too far.” They had attributed this to the United States, publicly. He smiled and

said, “Don't pay any attention to it. You know this is a free press.” Well, what he meant was —of course it wasn't a free press—it was not to be taken seriously.

One time the Minister of Information turned out to be mischievous. Jesse Jackson came to town once with his wife and two other women.

Q: Jesse Jackson was not a congressman but one of the leaders of the black community.

SEELYE: Jackson came out and the Minister of Information threw a luncheon for him at the Orient Club, which is a club the Syrian government entertains in. But at the last minute Jesse came down with a stomach ailment and he was in bed at the hotel. So his wife and two other women came to the luncheon without him. It was a little awkward for me because when I arrived right on time, the only other person there was the PLO representative. In those days we weren't supposed to deal with the PLO. I always found it very difficult to avoid these inadvertent meetings. His name was Abu Mazen, who is one of the key negotiators in the current talks. He was very civil and obviously I had to be very civil. After the guests arrived, one of the members of the Jackson delegation came to me and said, “We would like to have a picture taken of you with us for our newspaper.” I said, “Since you are in Syria, why not include the Minister of Information?” “Good idea.” So we are standing there waiting for the picture to be taken and unbeknownst to me the Minister of Information mischievously inserts Abu Mazen to his left. I am to the Minister's right. The photographer is about to snap the picture and just before he does, the Minister says to me, “Look, Abu Mazen is extending his hand, why don't you shake his hand?” I held back and the photographer snapped a picture without a handshake. I thought, “Okay, I will shake his hand now.” At that point he snapped another picture. The next day there was a headline in the leading Beirut newspaper and a picture of me shaking hands with the PLO representative. The headline said that the American Ambassador had restored relations with the PLO. That was one of the nails in my coffin. The desk claimed to understand, but I am sure they never understood upstairs. I heard that the Israeli embassy complained in Washington.

So, no, I didn't do much with the press because I knew it was hopeless. The press was just doing what it was told to do.

Q: In November, 1979, a group of radicals took over our embassy in Tehran as part of the revolution. The seizure of those hostages lasted for almost 444 days. How did that affect you in Damascus?

SEELYE: For one thing, of course, Syria had good relations with Iran. I am trying to recall whether I was instructed to intercede with regards to that, I don't think so. It affected us in the sense that immediately I stopped any relationship with the Iranian Ambassador. I had made an official call on him when I first came, but from then on I avoided him like the plague. But I don't recall that there was any particular repercussion in Syria. There were Iranians who used to come to Syria to visit a famous Shiite mosque and shrine outside of Damascus. The fact that Syria had relations with Iran I'm sure didn't make Washington very happy. It was just another negative aspect of Syrian foreign policy.

Q: What was your impression of the Carter Administration's view of Syria?

SEELYE: I think Carter had less of a negative attitude towards Assad because he had met him in Geneva. And as I said earlier, Assad makes a very good impression. We know that just recently in connection with his meeting with Clinton in Geneva. Assad also impresses people with his shrewdness. Therefore, I think Carter got a pretty good feeling for Assad. But I never could sense what Carter really thought about Syria because even though cables came out signed Carter you knew they weren't written by him or seen by him. I didn't sense that Carter was focusing much on Syria, Syria's having been left out of the Camp David negotiations.

Q: What did Assad realistically think that they could get from the Camp David meetings?

SEELYE: Syria wanted, of course, the return of the Golan Heights. With Egypt's making a separate deal, Syria felt the chance of getting the Golan Heights was lessened. Israel

would be under less pressure to make a concession to Syria at that point. Egypt had been taken out of the Arabs power equation. Now the biggest Arab army was neutralized. So that really worried Assad. One thing that concerned others of us—and maybe Assad too, although Assad didn't care that much about the Palestinian question, although he gave vocal support to Palestinian aspirations—was that the Camp David Agreement didn't include the Palestinians. It was intended to but it didn't work out. The Camp David Agreement made it more difficult for the Palestinian aspect to be solved for the simple reason that Israel would now be under less pressure to make concessions to the Palestinians.

Q: Did you see a reasonable solution, at least from an American point of view to the Golan Heights problem?

SEELYE: Yes, I did. I thought UNSC Resolution 242 was a sensible basis; an exchange of territory for peace. This meant the territory occupied after 1967. I felt confident that if the Golan Heights was returned, Assad would be agreeable to peace. Now at that point when I was there, the Syrians talked in terms of non-belligerency in return for Israeli withdrawal. But I felt that Assad would eventually come around to peace, which he has, of course, now. He now talks about full peace for full withdrawal. But at that point he wasn't prepared to publicly say that.

Q: When you look at the Golan Heights, I have seen pictures mainly from the Israeli side, and they do sort of loom over everything. When you say return of the Golan Heights, it is very difficult to think of a powerful Israel as it was then and remains, to allow somebody to be sitting there and looking down on them with military equipment, were you thinking of the Golan Heights without...?

SEELYE: It would be demilitarized, and there would be peacekeeping forces. Of course, it really doesn't matter whether you have military on top of the Golan Heights as long as there are missiles in Damascus that can reach Tel Aviv in a matter of seconds.

Q: It is psychological.

SEELYE: Of course. In any case Assad has agreed to demilitarization. He would like to have both sides demilitarized in order to salve his pride. In other words, he says that if you are going to demilitarize territory on my side of the line then you should also demilitarize territory on the other side. But that is not going to happen. So he will have to settle for the demilitarization of just the Golan Heights. At the moment there is a UN force on the Heights. You would have electronic equipment and that sort of thing. The Israelis say they want U.S. troops stationed on the Golan but I personally don't think that would be advisable.

Q: Did you find that when the Syrians made an agreement they followed through?

SEELYE: Oh, yes. The Israelis will tell you that. They are confident that if the Syrians make an agreement they will stick to it. Assad has been very conscientious in adhering to the agreement made after the 1973 war to have UN troops on the Golan. Every six months he renews the agreement automatically. So that doesn't seem to be at issue here.

Q: Shall we talk about your leaving or is there any other subject we should cover?

SEELYE: There was an occasion that was a little bit disturbing and to this day I do not know all the facts of the situation. Someday I am going to try to trace the person down who may have more facts. One day, about a week before I was going on home leave in June, 1980, the head of my three bodyguards contingent came to me. He was a very nice person and I was glad to have them, not because they were bodyguards, but because they could see exactly where I was going and what I was doing—and that I wasn't up to mischief. One day he came to me and said “We have been instructed to withdraw from providing you with security. Please call the Ministry of Interior and find out why because I don't know why.” Well, I didn't call security, of course, I called my friend the deputy foreign minister. I said, “I understand the bodyguards are being withdrawn and I just

wondered whether this is temporary or permanent. We appreciate the fact that you have been providing this service. If they are being withdrawn permanently I would like to know because then I'll get some substitutes. If they are temporary, I would like to know for how long." He said, "I will look into it." That was a Monday. So temporarily my security officer took a couple of guards from the residency and put them on escort duty. Tuesday came along and still no answer. Wednesday, nothing. Thursday, nothing. Friday was a holiday. I didn't want to keep calling him. I had called and made my point. I didn't want to seem to be demanding Syrian protection. I figured the embassy could hire people, and that was probably what we should do in any case.

Friday we had been invited by the British Ambassador and his wife to join them for lunch at one of the cafes along the Borada River along with a couple of guests from London. We accepted. So we went out to this place Friday and had an Arab lunch. When we returned to my car we found a car parked behind my car blocking our exit. It took a while to finally get somebody to push the car out of the way. That was Friday.

Monday, one of my three CIA people came in and said, "My God, I was away last week and while I was gone, one of my contacts wanted to see me to tell me that types from the Communist Party planned to blow you up at this Borada cafe. He wanted to warn me about it but he couldn't because I wasn't here. But fortunately it didn't happen because they found that seated at neighboring tables were senior officials of the Syrian government." Well, I thought this was a far-fetched story and thought, "Well, that can't be true." And then I began to think. The bodyguards were pulled off suddenly and there was a car blocking my exit. Maybe it was true after all. Maybe the Syrians didn't want the bodyguards to be killed. Maybe the idea was that if I was only wounded at the table and fled to my car, I could be finished off then because my car was blocked. To this day I don't know if this report is true or not.

Q: But if things were under such control...

SEELYE: It puzzles me because I don't think the Syrian government would want necessarily to have me killed. Yet, it would seem they knew what was planned because they removed the bodyguards. This suggests that the Syrians didn't mind my getting killed. It is a puzzle and I want to track down the CIA man to review more details of that story once more.

Q: Did the bodyguards return later?

SEELYE: No, the bodyguards never returned and the Deputy Foreign Minister never returned my call. So we had our own bodyguards. And I never raised it with the Syrians again. Very strange.

Q: Very strange. This is in an era when ambassadors were being killed.

SEELYE: Yes, but not in Syria, I thought, where the government was in tight control of things. Presumably they didn't want an ambassador to get killed. So one is puzzled. And to blow people up at a table you must know that you are going to risk a lot of innocent bystanders.

Q: Unless this is designed to go after the Communists or something like that...

SEELYE: Well, maybe it wasn't the Communists, maybe it was a group that was pro-Syrian and pro-Assad.

Q: But it sounds like collusion or something.

SEELYE: Something. The fact that the bodyguards were pulled off and the car was blocked just makes me wonder what the hell was going on.

Q: You left when?

SEELYE: I left on September 30, 1981.

Q: How did that come about?

SEELYE: I had actually retired in January, 1981 when the Department offered 7 # percent increase in pension if one retired right away. You don't have to leave your job immediately. You could retire at the end of your tour. So I took that.

Well, the day before I left my political officer came to me and said, “Look, something needs to be said publicly about the Middle East and U.S. policy. You should do this because tomorrow the AP man is coming to see you and also the Washington Post representative. I planned to brief them on the usual background. He urged me to take this opportunity to put some facts on the record.” I said, “No, I can't do this.” At a goodbye party the night before I finally told him to tell the journalists that I would speak for the record.

So, I went to my office before 9:00 and they came in at 9:00. I was going to the airport at 9:45. I saw them and gave my interview. I didn't say very much that was world-shattering. I said, for example, when they asked if I thought we should have relations with the PLO, “Yes, of course, because the PLO represents the Palestinians, and to deal with the Palestinian question you have to deal with the PLO.” And Begin was about to come to Washington, maybe that is why this hit the fan. They asked, “What about Begin's trip?” and I said, “Well, so long as Begin is Prime Minister there is no chance of having a Middle East peace because he is against the basic ingredients of a peace settlement.” Those were the kinds of things that I said.

Q: Do you by any chance have a text or anything of this?

SEELYE: No, I have a couple of press reports.

Q: If you could, give them to me at some point and I will put one in this interview.

SEELYE: There is an AP one and a Washington Post one.

Q: So, what happened?

SEELYE: So I flew off and our first stop was Athens. I told the Department that I was going to take leave for four or five weeks in Europe. It so happened that one of my ex-secretaries was there. We called her and she said, “Oh, your interview has hit the fan. I'll give you a clipping.” And sure enough it had hit the fan. It got international attention. I think probably because Begin was about to go to Washington. So I thought, I'm retiring, so what. We went off on our jaunt through Europe. Well, ABC and NBC tried to track me down, etc. We got to Paris, our last stop where we were staying with Chris Chapman, the DCM. I remember in the car from the airport he said, “Sadat has just been assassinated.”

By the time that I got back to Washington I guess the dust had settled, four weeks had elapsed. I came in to finalize my retirement, which took about a week to ten days. The office director was Nat Howell, who gave me a goodbye party in the office of Arabian North Affairs that I had headed 15 years before. And off I went. That was it.

Q: Nobody huffing or puffing?

SEELYE: Nobody called it to my attention. I think Nick Veliotes, the assistant secretary, was out of town most of the time I was back. Nobody gave me a call to reprimand me. I realize in retrospect I should not have given that interview. I was talked into it and I shouldn't have been talked into it. But it certainly put me on the TV circuit and in that sense gave me opportunities later on to try to educate people on the Middle East.

Q: Let me talk a bit before we wind this up about being extremely knowledgeable about the Middle East. At the same time there is almost the taint of being an Arabist which has been put into terms of somehow you are anti-Semitic and you are the bad guy for the Pro-Israeli side. How did you find yourself in this...?

SEELYE: The Arabist taint became evident only about half way through my career. Joseph Kraft wrote a piece in the New York Times magazine in 1971 alluding to “those Arabists

in the State Department." We had never called ourselves Arabists. We studied Arabic and specialized in the area. We were Middle East experts or specialists. If anybody had mentioned the term Arabist to me, I would have thought of an academician, a scholar, somebody who knows the ancient languages, etc. You might also have thought of some of the romantic British types, Lawrence of Arabia, etc. I don't think we thought of ourselves as Arabists. The term was first used by Kraft I think and from then on it became a pejorative term implying we were too pro-Arab and not sufficiently attuned to Israel's interests. But I don't ever remember in the Department or in the Foreign Service that the issue ever came up. I think as the Israeli lobby began to get more powerful in the eighties, it began to make the word more and more pejorative.

I remember that whenever we went on a trip to the Middle East (I had two assignments in Washington as so-called desk officer) we were told to stop in Israel. And I always did. In fact, when I was in Jordan, 1952-54, I made a point of going to Israel several times. What you did was; you went down to Jerusalem to the Mendelbaum Gate and replaced your Jordanian plates with Israeli plates provided by the Consulate General. In Israel, you would pick up hitchhikers and this way learn what was going on, what people were thinking. We became quite aware of how U.S. policy was geared to reflect domestic political interests. That was quite clear to all of us. We didn't feel it was our job, in our recommendations, to address that interest. That was for the people above. They could take care of domestic interests. Our job was to recommend policies that we thought were in U.S. national interests. This we did. Then, if our reports were discounted for political domestic reasons, that was up to the Assistant Secretary, or the Secretary, not us.

I remember when I was desk officer for Arabian Peninsula Affairs, 1961-64, an officer of the Israeli embassy who handled Middle East affairs cultivated us. He happened to be an Iraqi Jew. We used to have lunch together quite often, speak Arabic, and eat at Arab restaurants. The Israeli embassy would invite us to their balls every year. So we had association with Israelis. I don't think we thought of ourselves as anti-Israeli. We just thought of ourselves as specialists in the Middle East and on Arabs. We felt that

U.S. interests should be broad enough to take into account not only Israel's interests, but other interests. If anybody asked us, “Is Israel important to us?” The answer was in the affirmative. One tenet of our policy was to assure the preservation of the political independence and sovereignty of Israel. But we thought we should not tilt so heavily towards Israel. There were other interests like oil. So that was the position that we all took. But, of course, when you took that position, in the eyes of the Israeli lobby or those who were 100 percent pro-Israeli, it meant that you were anti-Israel. That is where we got into trouble.

Q: Well, I guess we might end it with this.

SEELYE: All right.

End of interview